

San Lorenzo Community Church United Church of Christ

Sermon: To Create a Dream

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, October 30, 2016

A reading from 1 Corinthians 12:7-14

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and Spirit distributes them to each one, just as the Spirit determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

This ends the reading from the First Letter to the Corinthians. Thanks be to God.

San Lorenzo Community Church United Church of Christ

Sermon: To Create a Dream

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, October 30, 2016

This week there was a picture going around on Facebook—maybe you’ve seen these kinds of things before – there is a picture of something from the “olden days” and if you remember doing it, watching it, playing with it or maybe you just know what it is, then you are supposed to “like” the picture and pass it along.

So this week there was a picture of a Home Economics classroom with two kitchen set ups and two girls in each classroom with the aprons tied around their waists, moving between counter and the oven. I know what that is. I took Home Economics when I was a sophomore in High School. First we learned how to sew the apron and then we learned how to cook a batch of brownies.

Having a dream for being a church is a lot like cooking, I think, because it takes some planning, some inspiration, some experiments, some failures, and a whole lot of different ingredients.

Now I know it is strange to hear my talk about cooking. My credentials regarding cooking are mostly in the “epic fail” category.

When I was in third grade, my friend Amy and I had lunchtime kitchen duty. This was in the day when school lunches were actually handmade on the school premises. So Amy and I dutifully went into the kitchen. We got our directions from the professional cooks who gave us a box mix for brownies. The chef had put all of the ingredients out on the table so we didn’t have to go searching for them. So Amy and I set about reading the instructions on the back of the box. Pour in the box mix into the oil, add the oil and the egg and then the recipe said “stir by hand.”

Well Amy and I looked at one another and said, what does that mean? Amy’s dad owned the best restaurant in Mt. Pleasant, so certainly she had to know something about cooking. My mom was a home economics teacher at the high school, so you would think that I would know something about cooking.

But we stared at that instruction – stir by hand. Of course we finally figured out that it meant don’t use the electric mixer – but we didn’t think the chef was going to let us near the electric mixer anyway. But that still left us with what seemed like a ridiculous conclusion – a conclusion that just seemed gross – given that there was a cracked egg in the dish.

The chef hollered over to our corner in the kitchen and said that the brownies needed to go into the oven soon. So, Amy and I looked at one another and then, put our hands into the mix and started mixing all of the ingredients together. Kneading the batter, using our fingers along the edge of the bowl to make sure all of the dry mix got included into the liquid. We kept having to scrape the batter off our fingers and hands because it was so sticky. Then we picked up handfuls of batter and put it in the oven pan.

The chef walked by and audibly gasped. It was not a good kind of gasp. It was “oh now you are in trouble” kind of gasp. She said – “What did you do?” I said, “the box said to ‘stir by hand.’” She said, “with a spoon . . . you always stir with a spoon . . . not your actual hands.”

Okay, so at eight years old maybe I can be forgiven for this epic fail.

San Lorenzo Community Church United Church of Christ

Sermon: To Create a Dream

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, October 30, 2016

When I was all grown up and living on my own in San Francisco, on a beautiful autumn day, I decided to make spaghetti squash with a tomato sauce. I read a recipe that made it look so good – and I had learned a lot about reading recipes since my early days – and I went to the farmers market and bought a spaghetti squash. I knew I had spaghetti sauce in the freezer that I had made before, so the whole dinner revolved around this new venture to make the spaghetti squash. The pictures in the cookbook walked me step by step through the process. I was so confident I even invited friends over to try my dinner experiment.

Because I am my mother's daughter, I had a double boiler which Mom had given me as a gift. Up to this point, I had used the double boiler to melt chocolate for those famous brownies I would make from scratch by hand. So I filled the bottom pan with water and brought it to a boil. I put the squash in the upper pan and closed the lid so it would steam. I had already thawed the spaghetti sauce so it just needed to be heated up in another pan.

Things were looking good. The steam in the kitchen was rising so I opened the window for some fresh air. The smells wafted into the courtyard behind my apartment. I'm stirring the sauce and thinking – how do I know when the squash is done? How long does it take? For this, the cookbook simply said, "steam until ready," which was not very helpful. So I did what every self-respecting 29 year old does in these circumstances, I called Mom. We talked. I don't remember the particular advice she offered; but I think she told me something about poking it with a fork or touching the skin or maybe it was looking at the color.

As I walked back into the kitchen with my new-found confidence, a pigeon flew in through the open window. It was a very small kitchen so the poor pigeon would hit the wall, sit on the shelf, fly into the glass part of the window as it was desperately trying to get out. I quickly closed the door to the kitchen so that it didn't fly into the rest of the apartment. I took my apron and started swinging my arms to direct the bird through the open window. After about five minutes of utter chaos the pigeon escaped and no damage had been done.

Except for that burning smell coming from the stove. I turned around in time to see flames jumping from the double boiler. I quickly turned off the gas stove and grabbed my box of baking soda – because the most important thing you can learn about using baking soda is that it is very effective in putting out a fire in your kitchen. I dumped the baking soda on the stove. I grabbed the double boiler and stuck it out the window into the flower box to cool off.

The spaghetti squash was toast, gonzo, beyond saving. The water had completely evaporated and with nothing left to create steam, the heat simply scorched the squash. The double boiler was damaged beyond repair. My stove was going to require a major cleaning. Thank God my spaghetti sauce was sitting in a closed pot. I took the lid off of the spaghetti sauce and discovered that I had not thawed and heated up spaghetti sauce at all. I was looking at a pot of chili, which turned out to be quick good that night to share among my friends.

There would be many times when, in my attempts to cook, I would call Mom. My mother was what I would call a "scientific" cook. She loved the science behind the ingredients – how they behaved, how they interacted, what would happen at different temperatures or with different treatments. She

San Lorenzo Community Church United Church of Christ

Sermon: To Create a Dream

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, October 30, 2016

also loved the gadgets and gizmos and utensils and appliances. For her, cooking was all about the measurements and timing and efficiency and, if something tasted good, well that was just a by-product. Flavor was not what she was about. For her, it had to be scientifically sound. So the answers to my questions were always very concrete and very practical.

Her gift of science taught me a lot about the difference between baking powder and baking soda and that you should never confuse the two when making brownies from scratch or when you need to put out a kitchen fire. Her gift taught me about preparing the oven in advance, going shopping before you start so all of the ingredients are on hand, pre-measuring everything, chopping and dicing ahead of time and then putting everything in order of use out on the counter. Cooking requires planning and, at this, my mother was exceptional.

So it sort of blew my mind when I discovered that everyone does not cook that scientific way. Take Cheryl, for example. Cheryl is an amazing cook – for her it's all about the inspiration and creativity; it's about the flavor and appeal; it's about creating something that draws you in and makes you think about how good that might taste and how happy you will be and how much she loves you.

This is also a gift, isn't it? A gift of the senses, a gift of being fearless to try something new, a gift of confidence that even a failure will be a learning experience and that you will have the ability to turn it around, a gift of bringing happiness and showing love.

Yes, having a dream for a church is a lot like cooking. It takes all of our gifts to make a church and fulfill our dreams. Last week you wrote down your dream -- your bold and audacious dream for yourself, for the church. Let me remind you of some of your dreams:

To be relevant and have an impact in our community and world:

- End crime in our community
- Stop violence
- Provide bags, blankets and food
- Give food to the poor
- Build peace in the world and safety throughout the land
- End poverty and homelessness in Alameda County
- Open a shelter and also open a program that help women and men get off drugs

To engage one another in fellowship and service:

- Reach out to sick and hospitalized friends and members
- Establish a robust gratitude program
- Encourage folks to join the choir
- Put on a concert for the community
- Hold a potluck dinner in the yard after church
- Support health and fitness for self and family and others

To teach and learn with our children and youth

- Create a strong youth program

San Lorenzo Community Church United Church of Christ

Sermon: To Create a Dream

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, October 30, 2016

- Go on a Youth mission trip
- Fill the church with more children
- Have more youth community events, maybe many UCC youth and other churches
- Continue teaching and making a difference in young people lives

To create opportunity for faith development and spiritual connection

- Be able to speak of God's gospel
- Be the example that all might believe in God
- Become a witness for God's love
- Offer multiple opportunities for spiritual connection and faith formation

To use our grounds, space and building as a place of witness

- Save water – remove the grass; use low water plants
- Paint unfinished areas of the exterior of the church
- Clean out the clutter
- Spend more time on church maintenance
- Use Chairs instead of pews in the sanctuary
- Create Flexible space in the sanctuary
- Install a Public labyrinth

To grow the church for generations to come

- Reach out to our community and open our doors to welcome them in
- Have the church full of people
- Reach out to new visitors and make them welcome
- Help with church growth and support the church
- To invite someone to church each week
- Have more families attending
- Invite friends to join us in worship
- This church has it all – this is a place of love

Bold and audacious. Try things we haven't tried before. Work with one another to use all of our gifts. Yes, having a dream for being a church is a lot like cooking. Every dream needs a plan – with specific steps on how you are going to take to achieve the goal. Your dream needs to move from wishful thinking to actual possibility. You have to think through how to get from here to there. And what you know for sure is that you will be called upon to expand your skills and talents, expand your knowledge and experience; you will use the gift of failure and the gift of inspiration.

Last week you were asked to dream big; and dream big you did. This week you are being asked to plan for that dream – to find a path to create that dream and let it become a reality. This week you will receive a letter and be asked to prayerfully consider your financial support for 2017. With these dreams ahead of us, we will need the gifts you bring—your gift of talent and present, your gift of skill and wisdom, and your gift of money and dreams.

San Lorenzo Community Church United Church of Christ

Sermon: To Create a Dream

Preached by Rev. Annette J. Cook

Sunday, October 30, 2016

It's an inspirit list, yes? It inspires me. It inspires me to know that you have gifts to share and ingredients to mix together. It inspires me to know there is a variety of goals and also common themes. It inspires me to know that by putting your dream down on paper you have already begun to think about how it could come to fruition, how your dream could come true right here, in this church, in this community, in this next year.

And to that I say "Amen."