

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
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**“Fired Up!”  
A sermon by  
Marilyn T. Hedgpeth**

**Trinity Sunday  
May 30, 2010  
Acts 2: 14–21; Ps. 8; Rom. 5: 1–5; Jn. 16: 12–15**

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Things are going along pretty smoothly at the Rosehaven Nursing Home until they admit an old man named L. Ray Flowers,

a one-time Pentecostal evangelist and gospel singer.

L. Ray sports a white forward-and-back hair wave

that covers the front of his balding head,

and is hair-sprayed as hard as a helmet.

He does tricks in his wheelchair to the delight

of the lady residents at Rosehaven;

he plays a mean guitar, dreams dreams,

and preaches sermons that he claims

just come to him out of the clear blue.

In one of his out-of-the-blue sermons to his elderly female following,

he pontificates about his latest grand vision:

“We are about to pronounce the grand fact that nursing homes and churches all across the land must become interchangeable,” L. Ray says.

“Why do we need a church house for Christians to visit on Sunday mornings when we’ve got nursing homes for Christians to visit?

Christians sitting in churches

while nursing homes sit around the corner is wrong...

And why do we need nursing homes when we've got vacant rooms  
in church buildings?

We need NOT two institutions such as these,  
going about instituting institutional double time.

We need one. And it shall be called Nurches of America....

I'm not saying we can take care of the very sick.

But we can take care of the very poor and the very lonely.

And all religions, all good people, all noble people, all noble old people,  
will be behind this bandwagon...

And we will see in the generation of our great grandchildren

Nurches of Mother Earth with Earthly Mirth, praise the God in us all,  
thank you very much."

(Clyde Edgerton. *Lunch at the Picadilly*, p. 81-82)

L. Ray plans to launch his movement right there

at Rosehaven Nursing home,

but he needs a name for this revolutionary new concept; a zinger,  
that will capture everyone's attention.

So, after much deliberation, he decides to call this movement to

fuse churches and nursing homes, "First Breakfast", since

the Last Supper thing has become kind of trite and over-used.

His vision, his dream, is to make history and to change the world!

Of course L. Ray Flowers is a fictional character

in Clyde Edgerton's book, *Lunch at the Picadilly*.

larger than life with his helmet-like hair-do,

overly verbose and a tad-bit crazy,

walking that thin line between inebriation and dementia.

But perhaps that's what they said about Peter,

and those householders in that Waco-like scene in Jerusalem

on that Pentecost Day.

If I'd been holed up in a house with 119 other people for 10 days,  
my hair would probably look scary too!

So when those men and women dance out of that place  
licked in the head by a spirit flame – each of them sporting a fire hat –  
babbling as if drunk, except that they babble coherently,  
and are understood by all, they spout some crazy ideas.

What if the mystery of Yahweh God is even bigger than they could have  
ever imagined: What if God is more than Yahweh God?

What if God is Jesus? And what if God is Spirit, too?

What if we could bring together an international forum of believers  
who all speak different languages and don't even understand each other;  
and what if God could make it possible for those believers  
to speak without any misunderstanding, whatsoever,  
whenever they speak of and through God's deeds of power?

What if everyone who calls on the name of the Lord,  
regardless of nationality, or gender, or age, or previous allegiance;  
what if everyone who calls out, "Lord, help me!" will be saved?

And what if the swarm of locusts referred to by the prophet Joel:  
what if those invaders who ravage and lay waste to a  
land and a whole way of life, just like a slick of oil might do;  
what if that destroyer, any destroyer, does not have the last word,  
because God will not allow it? Imagine that!

Because God has poured out the Holy Spirit/Jesus Spirit,  
so that sons and daughters, men and women, children,  
youth and old people, can and should  
see visions and dream dreams....if we will let them  
and encourage them to do so.

Do we? Do we encourage our people, all of our people, young and old,  
to see visions and dream dreams?

I participated in a wonderful funeral service a few weeks ago,  
the Service of Witness to the Resurrection for Homer Buck,  
the father of Susan Buck, and grandfather to Alex and Jackson,  
Megan and Kayla.

I wished that I had known him better, as we laid him to rest.

He was quite the character in his lifetime, a cowboy-type from out west,  
who loved all of God's creation, who loved his family,  
and who was an aqua-biologist by profession.

But one of the amazing stories that came out during his funeral,  
was that in his last years, as his physical abilities declined,  
and his energies became more focused,

Homer became more and more concerned about the issue of world hunger,  
and more convinced that he had stumbled upon a simple solution  
of commercially propagating silver carp,  
to provide adequate nutrition and much-needed protein to malnourished  
people throughout the world.

It was his dying dream and vision, his last passion, his first breakfast,  
to publish a paper outlining his plan –  
his crazy scheme to feed a hungry world.

And he spent his last years cajoling and brow-beating his three daughters  
to type, print, send and publish his paper and ideas in as  
many scientific journals as possible.

I don't know enough about carp and about their adaptability to adjust  
to different climates and environments  
to know if his plan might be really feasible.

But it was an astonishing dream and vision, and I think it was Spirit-driven,  
fusing his great love and knowledge of aquatic life  
with the world's great need of food for the hungry.

Homer was an eighty-nine-year-old man who dreamed a dream.

I am reminded, too, of Dewey and Bet Lawson's wonderful  
vision of making an educational booklet for our children and youth  
based upon the Christian signs and symbols  
displayed in our windows and in our church's architecture.  
Our church building preaches a sermon on its own every day,  
without anyone ever having to open his or her mouth.  
And so Dewey went around the church with a camera for weeks,  
taking pictures of paraments, railings, windows, and crucifixes,  
and he and Bet compiled them into a booklet  
with one page for every Sunday of the liturgical year,  
with very simple and clear texts  
explaining our rich ecclesial history that even a child, or an adult,  
might understand –  
that "from the lips of children, praise might resound",  
as the Psalmist would say (Psalm 8).  
Dewey and Bet, two educators, saw a vision to educate the children  
and youth of our congregation about the great history of the Church.

And Kathy Parkins reminded me of Phyllis Supple,  
who was the one person who saw the vision  
and believed the vision in the renovation of this sanctuary:  
that the choir loft could come down from where it used to sit  
hidden away, high above the chancel,  
to down on the floor where the choir could become an integral part  
of baptisms and communions, of times with the children,  
and the regular worship life of the whole people of God.  
Kathy didn't think it could be done; didn't think the old guard of the church  
would permit such a drastic change in our structure.  
But Phyllis had a vision of including the choir to enrich  
the worshiping life of the congregation.

And the first time that we held a baptism in our newly renovated sanctuary,  
and the choir got to witness the sacrament up close,  
I am told that some of them cried, to be so near to a holy moment.

And Katharine Whitmore reminded me of the wonderful  
dance theatre presentation this spring by the young woman  
Tevyn East, whose vision for social and economic justice  
was just as easily expressed by dance, movement, song and poetry,  
than by a long, boring lecture or sermon!

Tevyn saw a vision of incarnating her passion for economic justice  
and sharing that passion across the nation.

Ella Fountain Pratt would have loved it, as a fulfillment of her life-long  
dream/vision of promoting emerging artists in Durham –  
even in the Church.

And what about Bill Kalkhof and his passion for renovating downtown Durham?

Talk about turning a sow's ear into a silk purse!

And then there's the Durham Scrap Exchange, Self-Help, TROSA,  
the Latino Community Credit Union, Joe's Diner,  
and the Durham Performing Arts Center, just to name a few.

Who would have dreamed that these things might be possible  
for the general welfare, the betterment, of the people of Durham.

A recent editorial in *The Herald Sun* by Christopher Gergen  
and Alison Dorsey of Bull City Forward, made a plea  
for Durham to become a leader in social innovation and entrepreneurship.

Their editorial issued this bold claim and inherent challenge:

"Durham is uniquely positioned  
to emerge as a national model of urban development  
through social innovation and entrepreneurship  
because of three main assets: people, resources and need.

Durham boasts a deep talent pool at all educational levels,  
a thriving creative class,  
and a substantial and established technology industry,  
all of which feed innovation," it says.

(Gergen and Dorsey. *The Herald Sun*. "In Durham, showing how to save the world – profitably", May 15, 2010)

And I read the article, and I took my scissors and cut it out to keep  
because it struck a deep Pentecost chord in me;  
because it caused me to wonder about the mainline Church,  
and about our church specifically, with all of our  
talented people, and resources, and heartfelt awareness of need;  
and about our additional resource of the Holy God/Jesus Spirit.

I wondered if and why our church couldn't also be a model,  
an incubator of ecclesial, educational and missional development.

Why don't we experiment more, I wondered?

We are God's Pentecost people:

our people are seeing visions and dreaming dreams.

But are we encouraging each other to express our visions  
and to share our dreams?

Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire our words and our deeds,  
and are we fanning the sparks of the Spirit to flames of  
God's mighty power?

Or are we afraid of what might happen: that change might occur;  
that our church will be overrun with new customs and strange practices;  
that new people, who are not like us, might join our ranks?

Are we willing to leave all of that unsettledness to the Emerging Churches?

Or can we be the Spirit people that God is calling us to be?

I think we can. And I think that we are so called.

I think that we are so situated. And I think that the time is ripe.

Now.

The Reformed Tradition is at heart an oxymoron that implies a terrible tension.

To be Reformed is to be changing and always being changed

by dreams and visions, by crises and challenges,

by disasters and discoveries, by mistakes and great mysteries.

To be a tradition is to be somewhat the same, grounded, sure, certain,

resistant to whim and fantasy,

and to false claims and charismatic leadership.

But we have the privilege and the responsibility of being both

reformed and traditional at the same time,

and to feel the heat of God's fire on our necks.

Jesus, at one time, encouraged his disciples to reform their fishing technique,

to fish on the other side of their boat,

and the result was a miraculous catch of fish,

and an ensuing "first breakfast" club of innovators.

Silver carp could be considered a dangerous, invasive breed of fish,

or if we reform our thinking, fish on the other side of our brain,

it could be considered protein-rich food for a hungry world.

Envision. Dream. Move. Try. Become. Love.

The Holy God/Jesus Spirit has been poured out

on men and women, sons and daughters, young and old.

Our calling is to catch it, tap into it, allow it to shape us into God's

holy people, before it runs off. Amen.