

New Birth - 6/12/2011 - Matthew 1:18-23

I love Disney World! I went the first year it opened. Granted, I was an infant, but I was there! And my family went numerous times after that. Our tradition was to go every three years, and one of my favorite parts of the Magic Kingdom was the area known as Tomorrowland. For those who have never been, Tomorrowland was the part of the park that dealt with the future. No fairy tales here, this was science fiction, and even at a young age, that was what I loved.

Tomorrowland had attractions like Mission to Mars and the Astro Orbiter, and of course, Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress. Tomorrowland was meant to not just entertain, but also show the visitors the wonder and promise of the future. As Walt Disney himself said, "Tomorrow can be a wonderful age. Our scientists today are opening the doors of the Space Age to achievements that will benefit our children and generations to come. The Tomorrowland attractions have been designed to give you an opportunity to participate in adventures that are a living blueprint of our future." As a child, I remember looking at those attractions and being excited by the idea of a future with robots and video phones and infinite promise. Do you remember that from when you were a kid? All the talk of what the future would be like?

There is a moderately famous rant that began on an episode of Seinfeld. In the episode, Jerry and George are looking at new cars, and the question comes up, "Where are our flying cars? When I was a kid," one says, "they talked like they were just around the corner. What's the hold-up?" They then talk of other things they were promised as kids, floating cities and underwater cities and Seinfeld says, "It's like we're living in the 50's here!"

Where's our flying cars, is a rant that gets half-jokingly tossed around every now and then, and one day I read a response to the rant that went something like this. You can look up any piece of information in the universe, take and send pictures, text, play games and make calls all from a device smaller than a deck of cards. Quit asking when that futuristic stuff will get here, the future is already here!

For the last several weeks, our Grand Sweep readings have taken us through the prophets of the Old Testament, and finally, we have passed into the New Testament, into the gospels. After nine months of hearing about the creation and the history of the people of Israel, and hearing about the promise of the messiah, it is finally here. We lift up today the story of the Birth, of the beginning, of Jesus' time here on Earth. This was a time spoken of by prophets and angels, a time of New Birth, when the bright future that the Jewish people had been promised would become real. Mary and Joseph both would have grown up hearing the prophecies

and interpretations about the coming of the savior, of the coming of Emmanuel, which means "God with Us". So imagine their surprise when the angels came to the two of them and told them that not only had that time come, not only was the new future already here, but that they themselves would have a part to play in shaping that future.

But today, we don't just look at the Grand Sweep readings, because today is the Celebration of Pentecost. The day, when we remember the disciples gathered in Jerusalem after Jesus had returned from the tomb and been raised up into Heaven. The disciples were gathered together and praying. They were scared, their teacher and friend was gone. The Messiah of prophesy had left, and they were alone. They didn't know what the future held, and so they prayed. And suddenly, in a sound like a roaring wind, the Holy Spirit descended upon them like tongues of fire and they knew what they had to do. They burst forth into the streets, laughing and preaching, telling all who would listen of the glory of Jesus Christ. There were some in the crowd who questioned them, and Peter leapt up and told them all about the power of Christ, and said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our

God calls to him." And the Bible says that three thousand people were baptized that day and joined the family of believers.

Three thousand people were told of a new thing, a new future that they could have. Three thousand people were told of a new promise for Eternal Life through Christ. And the words of these disciples, powered by the Holy Spirit, brought forth a new thing that day, a new birth, the birth of the church, Christ's Body in the world. The Book of Acts, and the letters that follow in the New Testament are all about how that church was formed, how the word was spread, and how they sought out this new future.

When I think back to my childhood and the visions of the future that were shared with us by magazines and television, when I think back to how corporations would talk of designing things like the "Car of the future", or rocket packs or yes, flying cars, when I think back to how politicians used to talk about the bright future for America and the world...I've come to a realization. No one seems to be promising us a future anymore.

Instead, our promises, our expectations of the future seem to have become lowered to the level of the next new release, the next Steve Jobs announcement of what we need to buy. Instead of talk of the promise of the future, we get talk of the next summer blockbuster, or speculation over whether the next model of car will come with GPS and bluetooth. Even politicians have stopped really talking

about the future and focus instead on how they'll undo what their opponents have done in the past. Not what they will create, but what they will tear down. What are we to do when the politicians and the corporations and the media have all stopped talking about the future? What do we do when we stop hearing about what life will be like in fifty years and instead find the outlook of our culture limited to who will be kicked off what reality show next week?

Is this the bright shiny future I was promised as a child? Is this it?! Shouldn't we as a culture be reaching for more than slightly faster download speeds on our phones and better games on facebook? Shouldn't we as a church be reaching for more than just another year of programming, and hoping for more than slightly better attendance on Sunday mornings?

When the disciples were sitting there in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost all those years ago, what future did they see? These were not people with any special training, they were fishermen and tax collectors, ordinary people, who up until recently, had led very ordinary lives. What sort of future did they see? Jesus was gone. The messiah, the promised future had finally come, and the world had been too shortsighted to recognize it. So when the fire of the Holy Spirit came down upon them, they knew that if they wanted a new future, if they wanted to spread the word and make the dream a reality, they were going to have to do it themselves!

What sort of future were you promised?

Think of Mary and Joseph. When the angels came to them and told them what God asked of them, they knew that it was time to take charge, time to trust in the Lord, and make the future happen. Mary was going to have to not only carry the baby, but she and Joseph both were going to have to endure the whispered conversations and the ridicule that came along with everyone knowing that Mary was pregnant before the wedding, which back then was a HUGE deal, indeed, it was considered a crime that could carry the penalty of being stoned to death. And yet, Mary and Joseph both knew, that if this future was going to happen, if this promise was to be fulfilled, then they were going to have to step up, follow God's call, and do it themselves!

Now, maybe it is because I am one of the teachers of the Confirmation classes, and work so closely putting that service together, but I am often drawn back to the promises we made when we joined the church, and those we say when we have baptisms. We say as a congregation that we will support the ministries of the church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. This is the promise we make for the future of this church.

And I can tell you this right now, if this church is going to thrive and grow, we cannot just sit back and hope that someone else will carry the load. If we want a future beyond keeping the status quo, then we need to make it happen! If we

want this church to grow into the future that we see for it, we need to step up and do it ourselves! Now is not the time to be Pew Potatoes! Now is not the time to simply come and sit in worship and hope that someone else will make our future happen. Like the disciples on Pentecost, we need to let the Holy Spirit fill us up and light a fire in our lives.

Do you have an idea for where you want to see the church grow in the future, we have a team for you! Committees need members, Summer Sunday School needs teachers, the pancake breakfast needs volunteers, people outside the congregation need to be invited in! Now, you may be saying that you aren't a teacher, you aren't good talking to people, you don't have any special skills or training, well guess what? Neither did the disciples! These were ordinary fishermen and tax collectors, everyday people, just like you, and their first time out, they brought in three thousand people and gave birth to the church! You can be more than you know. WE can be so much more than we know, if we work together to plan and build for the future of God's church.

Last week, Pastor Ronni spoke about the financial difficulties facing the church. She told us in her sermon last week, that if every family gave as little as \$12 a month extra, if every family could give as little \$144 extra each year, then the shortfall in our budget could be covered. Think about that. Most families couldn't even eat at McDonalds for \$12. Imagine what we could do if every family

in the church decided to give just a little more each month. If once each month, instead of going to the movies or out to dinner, or even just out for ice-cream, each family gave that money to the church instead, imagine what we could accomplish. Imagine what the future of the church might look like if each family gave an extra \$20 each month, or \$25. Imagine what the future of this church would look like if we all, everyone of us, stood together and said we are going to be more than we are, we are going to do more than just sit and watch, we are going to fulfill the promise of this church and make our future happen, together! As one in the body of Christ!

The grand sweep has helped us see the past and where we as a church have come from as we have read through the entirety of the Old Testament, and as we celebrate today, the day of Pentecost, we remember the promise of the future laid before us. A promise through Christ, who came to forgive our sins, who was born in a stable in Bethlehem, and who offers us all a future of life eternal through him.

Amen.