

## DREAMS THAT TAKE ON LIFE

### **Everyone!**

Joel 2:23-32

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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The prophet Joel preached during a time of national panic. Drought and a locust plague ravaged the land. Notice how Joel saw this as an entry point for God's Word. Rather than add to the confusion and panic, he offered an alternative vision. What unique opportunity does FBC JC have in these days of fear and confusion? Instead of adding to the sense of panic, could we offer an alternative vision? God uses times of disequilibrium. During times of crisis, God's Spirit will undo all that has failed or isn't working well [Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 222].

The prophet Joel caught this vision of God's new work. He wanted God's people to catch up with God's dream. We've been dreaming God's dream here at FBC JC through our Imagine If visioning and discernment process. Remember our Imagine If process, our five big dreams? 1) God-centered worship; 2) Life-changing faith; 3) Authentic relationships; 4) Community transformation; 5) Global partners.

And Joel announces that if these dreams are going to take on life, we have to really "get" two words: **All** and **everyone** (vv. 28, 32).

Notice in v. 28 that all are eligible to be drenched in the Holy Spirit and used in God's service. No church office limitations, no economic or social limits, no gender or age limits. Speaking of gender, I'm proud to pastor a church that acknowledges the equality of gifts and calling among females. Years ago, when I was able to spend three days with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's biographer, Eberhard Bethge, he told us about a church in Germany whose pastor had been killed during WWII at the Russian front. So out of necessity, his wife assumed his duties and started pastoring the church. The church became accustomed to a female pastor. Years later, after the war, a man became pastor. Bethge told of a child heard running through the street, shouting, "Come look! A man in the pulpit! How strange!" Everyone!

If we are going to turn the FBC dream into deeds, it will take everyone. Consider this: The Apollo 11 spaceflight to the moon in 1969 carried three crew members. The first humans to walk on the moon! But get this. At least 500,000 people worked on the project, behind the scenes. Everyone! FBC, we need to stop worrying about perfection and focus more on participation!

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "I realized God could save the world without me, but when He told me that I might help Him, I praised Him for the honor and privilege."

God's FBC dream will never take on life if we forget the words "all" and "everyone." Someone has said that the most boring experience known to humanity is the reading of a last will and testament--unless your name is in it! I love the story of the young man named Andrew who was sitting through the reading of his uncle's will. Finally, the attorney got to the good part: "And to my nephew Andrew, who loved money..." (wait for it)..."I leave my Monopoly game." Did you know your name is in the Bible? "Whosoever...everyone...all..." John 3:16; Joel 2:32. We used to sing the hymn, "Whosoever Meaneth Me." This v. 32 is the one Peter quoted when he preached at Pentecost and 3,000 were saved. It's what the Apostle Paul quotes in Romans 10:13. That Romans passage is marked in all the Bibles I own. It's "everyone."

During the course of the week, I'll be listening to someone in pain. "I'm the only one in church who \_\_\_\_\_" (you fill in the blank--has mental illness, financial woes, addiction, no clothes for church, a failed marriage, embarrassing sins, too many sins to be forgiven). But I tell them, the person sitting beside you feels the same way. God loves everyone. Everyone can be saved.

Isn't it sad how we want to put restrictions on God's lavish love? Don't you love those advertisements with the disclaimer, "Some restrictions apply"? An asterisk, "Offer only good 2am to 6am weekdays." Or, "Offer not valid in the 50 states and Puerto Rico." We like to put asterisks on God's love. God loves everyone...except...Everyone is welcome at FBC JC...except...Here's the Gospel of Jesus Christ: Love with no restrictions! Everyone!

Apocryphal or true, I love the story about John Wesley. He was sitting in a small group with a group of boys. They started making fun of a poor lad who had come without shoes. Wesley didn't say a word. He took off his shoes and continued teaching the Gospel. Everyone. Has it ever occurred to you that each of us is either a closed door blocking others or an open door inviting them? Everyone!