

**Westminster Presbyterian Church + 533 S. Walnut St. + Springfield, IL 62704**

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### **Voices of Hope**

Acts 2:14a

Last Sunday I worshiped in Geneva, Switzerland in an ancient church called the Auditoire, where the reformer John Calvin delivered many of his famous lectures on theology. A congregation of the Church of Scotland worships there every Sunday morning. When worship was over I had a conversation with the pastor of the Scottish congregation, a man named Ian Manson. He was describing what it was like to do ministry in a place that is so closely identified with John Calvin.

He cited an incident that had taken place the previous day. The congregation had hosted a concert performed by a touring youth choir. After the concert one of the members of the congregation said to the pastor, "These kids were great, but I wonder what Calvin would have thought." Manson went on to point out that this woman clearly assumed that Calvin would have been against anything that was new or innovative in the church. We quickly agreed that most people who have grown up in the churches influenced by Calvin have very little appreciation of the fact that innovation was what Calvin was about. He was a leader in a movement that reinvented the church. A key element in that process was introducing new music and new worship forms which equipped the laity to be the church for their time.

The Book of Acts tells us that when the day of Pentecost came the disciples were struggling to understand what it meant for them to be the church of Jesus Christ. They were looking for a voice which could articulate the nature of the mission Jesus had given to them. Jesus had by then gone to the Father and left them on their own in a chaotic and fearful world. Their memories of being on the road with Jesus were not enough. They were praying for a voice that could provide a much needed sense of direction.

On the day of Pentecost their prayer is answered. The disciples hear the sound of a rushing wind. Suddenly the barriers of language, race, and culture which have separated people are broken down. In this moment they receive a vision of a new kind of community that is being born in their midst. Then they realize that this is what Easter is all about. Continuing the process of bringing this new community of faith into being is the mission that God has given to them. This is what Jesus has sent them to do. Peter immediately stands up to preach to this huge gathering explaining this hopeful vision. From this moment the disciples are no longer defined by their fear or their confusion. They are defined by a new word of hope which they feel compelled to share with others. The other disciples will soon join Peter as voices of hope announcing a new future.

The first city of Switzerland to embrace the Reformation was Zurich. The people of Zurich responded to voices of hope which articulated the meaning of a new era for them. One element of that message was so novel that people could not doubt they were entering a new era. Preachers like Huldrych Zwingli argued that the Christian faith belonged to the people. Therefore the people and not the ruling classes should decide whether to stay with the old Church or to embrace a reinvented Church which would be more responsive to their spiritual needs. For the first time in history the people of a city voted on the future direction of the Church.

One of the less well known voices in the reform process in Zurich was the Abbess of the Fraumunster Abbey, which was one of the wealthiest in Europe. Katharina von Zimmerman was from a Southern German noble family. She knew how to navigate in a world dominated by men. The Swiss National Museum in Zurich has reconstructed the private dining room where she entertained cardinals, bishops, and city officials. In order to enter that room her distinguished guests had to walk under a prominent inscription over the door. It said, "He who slanders women does not know what his mother has done. Women should be praised rightly or wrongly." These are good words to remember on Mother's Day. Katharina knew how to set the tone for her power lunches.

At her invitation the Reformer Huldrych Zwingli made frequent appearances in the pulpit of the Fraumunster. When the people decided to embrace the reinvented Church, Katharina's voice of hope could not be misunderstood. She took the keys to the abbey and its huge portfolio of property and handed them over to the city fathers. It was a powerful statement that the church truly belonged to the people.

The voices of hope which spoke at Pentecost were like that. These voices dared to give birth to new possibilities of faith and mission which continue to feed our spirits today.