

A YOUNG MAN DREAMS A DREAM

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Matt 16:13-18

“Men do not reach the stars
By digging in the murk of the stream.
Stars are reached by those who sing:
Climb the Ladder of a Dream.”

Have you ever had a dream? Not some wild flight of fancy, some cloud-crowned castle in the air, but a dream. A soul possessing, life-directing dream of what you and that wee part of the world which is yours might be if given half a chance. I'm sure you have. As Jefferson once said, :“Everyone should have a dream, and every dream should have a purpose.”

But must be the right kind of dream. Daydreams are dangerous—for they conspire to lull us into a narcotic state of self-satisfaction—and that's bad. But dreams are dynamic—for they inspire us to reach for lofty heights of real achievement—and that's good. To daydream is a curse. But to dream? Oh, *that's* a blessing!

It was a dream. A dream of people who could worship God in freedom, who could govern themselves in justice, who could build together in peace, that gave our pilgrim fathers the courage and incentive to make America.

It was a dream. A dream of a world which had shed its darkness that drove a man called Edison to make a tiny bulb which, when leashed to the power of electricity, caused our lives to be blessed with light.

It was a dream. A dream of a world which was free of its muteness that caused Marconi to build his wireless and thus today, through the miracle of radio we speak, and the words which tumble from our lips are hurled in an instant around the earth.

It was a dream. A dream of people who could move about unencumbered by some dumb beast of burden that made Henry Ford invent his “horseless carriage”.

It was a dream. A dream of people who were free of the ties of earth-bound creatures that led George and Orville Wright to build their marvelous “machine that flies”.

It was a dream. A dream of someone somewhere that gave us all of the big and little things which unite to make our lives a blessing.

And it was God's dream of people
who would hate sin and love righteousness,
who would sacrifice self to be His servants,
who would measure time so they might live in eternity,
who would crucify sin by confessing Christ and thus become members of His family of heaven;
it was *this* dream that brought our world into being. It was *this* dream that caused God to create Adam to love and be loved. And when this creature made in the image of God had sinned and forsaken His Creator, it was the dream of people redeemed that led God to offer up His Son for our salvation. It was God's dream that gave us hope and joy and life.

So you see, it's a blessing to dream and to be a dreamer, but only if that dreamer and his or her dreams are linked to the Energy that creates. Someone has said,

“Dreams are the seeing of visions,
The hearing of golden chimes,
Only a dreamer conquers,
Only a dreamer climbs.

“Dreams have the lift of a lever
Dream have the power to drive
They who have known no dreaming
Have never been alive.

“So dare to fight for your dreaming
And dare to dream anew

Knowing the God of dreamers
Will make your dreams come true.”

Well, this young man has a dream. It is his dream of a church. A church that could be, but more than that, a church which, under God, I have faith to believe will be.

It all began in a hotel room in Bangor, Maine. The telephone had rung, the call had come, and with Mel Anderson's voice ringing in my ears, I set to wondering about what kind of church this Morgan Park Baptist Church would be.

Perhaps my dream was a bit premature, for both Mr. Anderson and I had agreed my brief visit to Chicago would be merely exploratory in nature. And yet, by some peculiar trick of the mind, my wondering became a dream. As the hours passed I caught a vision of a church which would be the apple of God's eye, because it was a church which, in every way, sought to be obedient to His highest call.

What were the thoughts conceived that day in Bangor, Maine and now are given birth in this first message from my heart to you? To begin with, the church of which I dreamed was

A Place of Worship

A place where God was held in holy awe. A sanctuary from the cares and strife of life. A safe place where people could come because they knew that this was a church that practiced the secret of His Presence.

Someone has said the church is just one generation from extinction. Our generation! If this be true, it is because our God is too small. We have served up half a Christ for tender minds, and have refined our concept of God into a palatable capsule that shallow people can swallow with ease, until now, in the hour of its greatest opportunity, the church goes forth to war, a poor, emaciated, misshapen thing.

Our God is too small. In fact, says C. S. Lewis, “Modern Christians believe in religion without God, Christianity without Christ, Heaven without Hell, a God of love but not of wrath, a church that can bless, but cannot curse.”

Apparently afraid of antagonizing a sleeping church, far too many of pulpits have meekly mumbles the incredible message : you must repent -- to some degree, and be converted -- in a measure, or you'll be damned -- to some extent.

Our God is too small. For the Author of Life, the God who hung the stars in space, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Omnipotent One who breathed the universe into being by the word of His power, for *this* God, the Creator and Sustainer of all, we have substituted a tottering, gray-haired grandfather. “Have you talked to the man upstairs?” swung out with a solid beat, seems to be the measure of our shallow, earthy worship.

Our God is too small. We have lost sight of His justice. We have rejected His wrath. We have diluted His righteousness and sentimentalized His love. For the great white throne of heaven we have substituted a rocking chair. For the God of judgment we have offered a benevolent old Santa Claus -- white whiskers, ruddy cheeks and all -- who cheerfully doles out salvation to the good, the bad and the indifferent.

It might be well for us to recall the response of General Omar Bradley to the question “What's wrong with our age?” Said he,

“We have too many men of science and too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the sermon on the Mount. Man is stumbling blindly through spiritual darkness while toying precariously with the secret of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom. Power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical pygmies. We know more about war than we do about peace, more about hating that we do about loving.”

There is only one solution to our problem, and that is to know God as He is. While our puny, manmade gods may be too small, the fact remains that God is Great, and He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

In my dream, I saw a church that rejected the false gods of the modern mind. A church whose sanctuary was permeated with a sense of His presence. A place where, as the people entered, their whispering ceased, their burdens lifted, their hearts rejoiced.

A place where they could find a ladder of communication rising to their heavenly Father and with joy-filled faces they would leave each service saying, “Once again, I have met my God!”

This was the church of which I dreamed. A church which was --

Centered in Christ

A church which found no other reason for its existence than to bring an ever expanding group of people into a living relationship with Him.

One of the tragedies of our world is that the very organization which should be making Christ known sometimes conceals Him within its walls. In his fine book, Where Are The People? Sydney Powell refers to a church that burned, leaving little more than a pile of rubble. One of the art treasures kept in the old church was a beautiful copy of Thorvaldsen's eight-foot statue, “The Appealing Christ.”

Miraculously, though the historic Peoples Church of St. Paul was totally destroyed, the lovely marble statue was unharmed.

Dr. Powell describes the shock he experienced when driving home one night he saw “The Appealing Christ” standing in the street against a backdrop of complete destruction, surrounded by flares to protect it from the milling masses who sauntered by. There, for the first time, hundreds of people saw the statue. They had never been aware of its presence in the city before. In Dr. Powell's memorable phrase, “‘The Appealing Christ’ was in the church, but the crowd that passed by knew nothing of His presence.”

This should be a warning to us here. We have magnificent music. Helpful sermons. Delightful fellowship. Beautiful services of worship. But the world will not be won by what takes place *within* these walls. The multitudes which pass our doors will neither know nor care what happens here. It is only as we open up the partitions between us, as we expose Christ, preach Christ, and live Christ, that those within the scope of our immediate responsibility will be redeemed.

This was the Church of which I dreamed. It was a church of --

Vision and Compassion

A church which was willing to accept the challenge to be a challenge to our modern world. There is only one limitation to the promises of God, and that is the limitation we place upon them ourselves. God is willing that we do great things for Him. “Herein,” said Christ, “is my heavenly Father glorified, that ye bring forth *much* fruit” (John 15:8).

William Cary said, “Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.”

But, as the Bible also says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18).

God is not in the business of doing great things through small people with crippled vision.

Our vision is linked to our compassion.

When we really see the hopelessness of people without Christ,
when we remember the plight from which we ourselves have been redeemed,
when we link the need of the spiritually unenlisted with the sacrifice of Calvary, in other words,
when our hearts are flooded with compassion for a lost and dying world,
then our hands will be moved to greater efforts for the Kingdom's cause.

That will not be easy, but it will be glorious adventure. There is much to be said for the spirit of Paracelus, when in Robert Barret Browning's great poem he is made to say,

“Are there not, Festus, are there not, dear Michal,

Two points in the adventure of the diver?

One, when a beggar, he prepares to plunge.

One, when a prince, he rises with his pearl.

Festus, I plunge!”

That is the spirit of the church of which I dreamed. It was a church which plunged -- *and won* --
because it knew that when all of the possibilities were against it, all of the impossibilities were

for it!

Which brings me another part of my dream. It was of a church --

Filled with Power of the Holy Spirit

Many of our churches have a strange, unholy kinship to the church at Ephesus, who, when Paul asked if they had not received the Holy Spirit when they believed, answered, “We did not know there is a Holy Spirit”(Acts 19:2).

Indeed, there is no doubt the third person of the Trinity is an unknown God to many of us. We have associated the Holy Spirit with the Pentecostal sects. Because of our natural revulsion for extreme emotionalism, we have rejected, or at best ignored, the primary source of the church's power.

Friends, nothing can compensate for the lack of the Holy Spirit in our lives as individuals or as a church. What the tap root is to a tree, the Holy Spirit to us. We shall stand powerless and afraid in the face of our difficulties and foes unless we learn that thru Him, a mighty tide of love and power can flow into our lives.

As a Christian your life is linked with the mightiest force ever known to man. Dammed up within you is the tremendous power of the Holy Spirit. A power which you alone can let loose, but a power which once unleashed will make you, like Paul, “More than conqueror”.

You have often heard it said that some Christians have just enough religion to make them miserable and not enough to make them happy. Actually, many of us have just enough Christianity to keep us from going deeper into our faith.

How many times have you parents said to your child when you found him or her nibbling at something, “Stop eating that! It will spoil your appetite!” Well, an appetite is supposed to be spoiled -- in the right way! That is, by partaking of good, wholesome food. But many of us have

nibbled at Christianity just enough to spoil our appetite.

If our church is to be the church it can be, not only must it be empowered by the Holy Spirit so our Christ-centered worship of God will issue in consecrated service, but each and every member on our rolls must be so committed to Christ we can say, “I am crucified. I literally am dead. I live no more. But Christ lives *in* me. I'm ready to give up trying to be Christ-like and I'm going to let Christ live His life through me.” That is what it means to be truly Christian. That, alone, is the secret of abundant living.

As the great Scotsman, Guthrie, put it, “We must be emptied of self before we can be filled with grace. We must be stripped of our rags before we can be clothed with righteousness. We must be wounded before we can be healed, killed before we can be made alive, buried in disgrace before we can be raised in Holy Glory. These words, 'sown in corruption that we may be raised in incorruption, sown in dishonor that we may be raised in glory, sown in weakness that we may be raised in power', are as true of the soul, as of the body. To borrow an illustration from the surgeon's art, a bone that is set wrong must be broken again, in order that it may be set right.”

Again, I bring this into the focus of your life. You may, or you may not, possess the things of wealth. You may, or you may not, be endowed with potentialities for superb and scintillating service. But this one thing you *do* possess: *A will!* A will which is your very self. Therefore it is the one, the only thing, Christ requires.

To be Lord *at* all, He must be Lord *of* all, and thus He asks, “Your will, please.” Nothing more is possible, nothing less will do.

“Laid on thine altar, O my Lord divine,
Accept my gift this day, for Jesus' sake.

I have no jewels to adorn thy shrine,
Nor any world-famed sacrifice to make.

“But here, within these trembling hands, I bring

This *will* of mine, a gift that seemeth small.
But Thou doest know, dear Lord,
That when I give Thee *this*, I give Thee all.”

And thus I dreamed my dream. My dream of a church.
A church wherein the Holy awe of God is felt and known.
A church where people come, not to prattle idly of foolish things, but to bow in humble worship
before the throne of the Most High.
A church where God, in all of His Omnipotence and Glory is heard to speak above the din and
clatter of our soulless, modern world.
A church where after the noise and strife of a secular society, the people present are privileged to
hear the “still, small voice.”

A church which honors Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Savior.
A church where Christ is more than a mere formality, more than a pleasant appendage to lesser
things.
A church where Christ in all of His eternal vitality and life is central.
A church where people are brought into His loving, though oftentimes disturbing presence, and
upon seeing Him, their lives are changed.

A church where the Holy Spirit is neither strange or unknown.
A church where every member knows the quiet hush of His indwelling presence and thus is a
conqueror and king.
A church where Christ-likeness is the mark of its members.
A church where stamped indelibly upon the life of each and all are the words, “Not I, but Christ”.

A church where unity of faith makes unity of action.
A church where even the smallest meeting of a class, or the most important issue of a business
meeting, is smoothly met and handled because no one is asking, “What do I want,” but rather,
“What would Jesus do?”

A church of compassion for the lost.

A church which sees those about it, from the man of affairs to the child in the street, as more than bodies, but as *souls* who are loved and longed for by God. “Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings.”

A church of vision.

A church whose parish is the world and adjusts its sights to encompass the earth.

A church which is famous for its song.

A church which sings because it can do nothing less than sing the praises of its risen King.

A church filled with the music of laughter.

A church where those who enter disconsolate, downcast, in despair, shall sense the captivating joy of happy hearts, hearts whose joy is found in Christ, and in the knowledge of sin forgiven.

A church of children. Of dream-inspired youth. Of hope-filled Moms and Dads. Of quiet, full-lived “Grams and Gramps.” Where the lilt of children's laughter, the terrible determination of the teens, the dreams and hopes of young couples who build homes new and shape new lives, are mingled with the maturity of those who have lived long and found life full.

A church which, if it *must* fail, will do so because it tried to do too much, rather than because it was content to do too little! And with it all --

A church which, when the eyes of God did fall upon it, His face would smile and He would say, “This is *my* church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”