

“THE DREAM OF EASTER”

John 20:1-18

preached on Easter, April 4, 2010

A song from “Les Miserables” begins, “I dreamed a dream my life would be” What are the dreams in your life? Everything we have is the result of a dream. Today we take bypass surgery almost for granted, but there was a time when it was merely a dream. Air conditioning and flush toilets both began as a fanciful dream. The whole Disney Empire began as the dream of one man. First he saw it in his mind, and then he brought it to life in our world. From matches to combustion engines, from cotton candy to concrete construction, all of it is the result of a dream. Most everything we have in life, everything that is a creation of human ingenuity, started out as a dream. Before anything can become tangible, it must first become a reality in the mind of its dreamer. Only when the dream is real for one can it become real for all. Not until the dream is real for me can it become real for you.

So why is it that we live in a world furnished with the dreams of others, and yet there are so many nightmares stalking the land? We dreamed up the power of nuclear energy but we live with the nightmare that some terrorist will use it to destroy us. We dream up the idea of communities that trust but we live with the nightmare of high-tech security systems as we hide behind locked doors out of fear that someone might even steal our identity. We dream that every child will be nutritiously fed, but we live with the nightmare that flows from fast foods and quick and easy sugars. We dream of justice and equality, yet we live in a nightmare of separation, hatred, and fear. And when the dreams turn into nightmares, it is hard to keep dreaming, and very easy to stop.

A member of the “buster generation”, busters are the people born between 1964 and 1983, this buster wrote in his church’s newsletter about the despair, cynicism and pessimism of his generation. And he also spoke of the death of idealism; the death of passion, the death of transforming vision, and even the death of dreaming among his peers. There was a time when the younger generations would have dreams of changing the world. But as a society, over these past few decades we have started raising our children on our fears rather than our hopes; we’ve raised them on our problems and limitations, not on the possibilities of a better life. And now they are left with the hope of merely surviving rather than thriving, as life is meant to be.

Occasionally we hear someone lament over the lack of hope and vision in our younger generations. We see a society focused on violence, death, and destruction. We have seen our schools become deadly battlegrounds, and we wonder how this has come to be. Why is this

happening? And a recent e-mail reminded me that we have allowed prayer and the Bible to be taken out of our schools. A sighting of the 10 commandments on public property is an invitation to court proceedings. We have taken discipline out of our schools and often out of our homes out of fear that we might bruise the self-image of our children. We have given out condoms and then been surprised when our kids became promiscuous. We have allowed abortions without parental consent. Video games were first developed by the military so soldiers could kill more easily in battle, and then we gave those same violence inducing games to our children. And yet we wonder why we are living in the midst of so many nightmares. Because we reap what we sow.

But there can be a better way. Jesus, our Lord, has been through the worst nightmare in the history of humanity. He came offering a gift of love, and we turned our back on him. Actually, turning our backs might have been better. We ran away and abandoned him. We mocked him, and beat him, spit on him, and abused him. We nailed spikes through his hands and feet and hung him on a cross. We pierced his side to allow the rest of his blood to be poured out as the perfect sacrifice offered to God. And we placed him in a tomb believing that we would never see him, never hear from him again. And then we scurried away to try to live with the nightmare of guilt that we had cast upon ourselves.

But our God, our Lord Jesus, took the nightmare of Good Friday and transformed it into a dream of hope and new life that we call Easter. And because he had the will, the love, the power to end the nightmare of grief and death, the way has now been opened for ending all the nightmares that afflict our journeys into the darkness of life. For now we know the reality that nothing is impossible with God. No problem, no obstacle can hold us back when we walk with the Lord. Now we have the ability to dream of plenty in the midst of poverty; dreams of compassion in the midst of pain; dreams of justice in the midst of prejudice and inequality; dreams of love in the midst of hatred. Now we can dream of holiness even if we stand in the midst of hell.

But dreaming in and of itself is not enough. Many Christians are struggling, are trying to dream, but they are merely seeking comfort and happiness instead of the joy that God intends for us. And sadly, many even among the church have yet to learn the distinction between dreaming dreams of happiness and dreaming dreams of joy.

Who says Christians are supposed to be “happy?” Have we taken too literally the summer camp songs: “If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands, stomp your feet, say ‘Amen.’” and then we go through our Christian calisthenics in an attempt to show the world how happy we are in Christ. We have put so much emphasis on looking happy and “being happy” when what we really

happy” when what we really need is to start dreaming dreams. Long ago, lifted by the power of the resurrection, the followers of Jesus began to dream dreams of a new way; to dream dreams of a new world. And the world around them never said, “Do you see how happy those Christians are?” No! They said, “See how these Christians love one another.” Christians are not necessarily happier than non-Christians, at least as the world defines happiness. But we are more joyful. We are more joyful because we can take the risk of dreaming of a better way, a better world. And our dreams have power because the dream of the resurrection of Jesus has come to pass.

Columnist Russell Baker once wrote, “The truth is I don’t feel good most of the time and don’t want to. Moreover, I do not comprehend why anyone else should want to.” It’s normal not to feel good all the time, not to go around happy all the time, even if we are doing something great for God. But the dream of Easter, Easter dreaming is not about happiness. Christians have no “right to happiness.” Christians may or may not be more “happy” than non-Christians. But we need to be more joyful. Joy is a condition of “gladness,” “delight,” “exultation of spirit.” It is knowing that we can and do stand awed and amazed in the very presence of God. This same God from whom we turned away has shown such amazing love, such amazing grace, that it allows us to live with our hearts in heaven even though our feet are planted on the earth. We may not be able to be happy standing in the nightmares of life, but God has given us the gift of joy that transcends this world and carries us into his presence. Happiness is fleeting, but our joy in Christ remains, always. Joy is the stuff Easter dreams are made of. And it is joy that fills us with glory and lifts us to new life. And it has been that way ever since that first Easter morn, for it was with the renewed dreams of Easter joy that the women raced back to tell the other disciples what they knew. Christ is risen! The Easter Dream is in our midst. It is the Easter Dream that allows the hope of dreaming what life can be; the hope that joy will continue to live in our hearts.

Why did the Berlin Wall come crashing down 20 years ago? Because one church in Leipzig, East Germany, the Kikolai Protestant Church, began dreaming the Easter Dream. Its pastor, Kristian Fuehrer, believed that it was time the Christian church stopped “diluting the message” of the gospel. So his church started some prayer meetings on Monday evenings, prayer meetings that began with the Easter Dream that “all things are possible.”

Within a short time, the praying people encountered “in [their] services and meetings ... the miraculous experience of feeling the effect of the Word.” In the words of the pastor, God’s presence Awas with us. It was with us, all of us,” and soon the number of people praying swelled to over 200,000, 90 percent of whom were non-Christians but were drawn by this Easter energy. It was these pray-ers who poured out from the meeting on that fateful Monday evening to protest

Monday evening to protest in the streets, crying, “We are the People.” The movement that toppled the Berlin Wall was fueled by praying people who took the power and the dream of Easter seriously.

Why hadn't they felt that power before? According to Pastor Fuehrer, it was because the church had been seduced by an image “of Jesus as one who doesn't disturb, who is only passive,” who is there only to make people happy. Through prayer and Bible study, they found a “Jesus that spoke the truth directly to the people” rather than accepting a Jesus that made no waves, and meekly sat on the sidelines waiting for an opportunity to make people happy. They found in the resurrected Jesus the power to dream again good dreams for their city and their nation. Indeed, Pastor Fuehrer believes it may be more difficult to keep the Easter Dream alive in freedom than in oppression because in freedom, one is tempted to dream impotent materialistic dreams instead of the spiritual dreams of power and grace.

Today we have a world of people living in the nightmare of Friday night. They are living in the darkness of death and fear, of pain and worry. They wonder what new terror the morrow will bring. But Jesus took the nightmare of Friday night and transformed it into the wonder of Easter morning. Many in the world want to crush our dreams, those bold wonderful dreams that transform a congregation, a community, a nation, a world. They want to keep us languishing in the nightmares of Friday night. But Sunday is on the way. The stones of doubt and fear have been rolled back. Not even death can stop us now. For the hope, the power, the dream of Easter is now upon us, is now within us, and we can dream a dream our world might be God's kingdom on earth just as it is in heaven. And now, even now, we can make the dream of Easter come to life in this time, in this place, for Jesus, the hope and dream of Easter is alive and in our midst.

Go forth to dream big dreams! Go forth to bring those dreams to life! Go forth to tell the world that Jesus is alive and nothing will be the same again for we have a hope, we have a power, we have a dream, a living dream, and his name is Jesus. In your life, may you know it is so. Amen.