

II Corinthians 4:16-18

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

I Samuel 17:38-46

Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.' But David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

Our Dreams; Prophetic or Pathetic?

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We have so much talent in this church, and I know that you would want me to express to the quartet and to Romy and Karen our appreciation for the leadership that they gave us in the music that was provided today.

Once Yogi Berra was getting his picture taken, I think for a bubble bum card. The photographers said to the Hall of Fame Yankee catcher, "I want you to look straight into the camera now and smile." And Yogi put his hand up in front of the camera and said, "Oh, I can't do that. That's my bad side." Today we think about our bad side, our good side, and our best side. Is our best side the way we look when we look back? Have our best days been in the past? Is our best side the way we look when we're staring at the present? Or is the best side we have, the side we face when we're looking toward the future? Are our best days here and now? Are our best days ahead of us? What's our best side?

This morning I want to think out loud with you about our dreams. It's happy talk. You gotta have a dream, because if you don't have a dream, how are you going to make a

dream come true? It's a song from *South Pacific*. What is your dream? What is your wildest dream? What is your pipe dream? What is the dream you have when you're looking through the smoke? Do you want to be known for your skill in the way you speak and the things you say? Do you aspire to be called upon to do what no one else can do? Do you want to be John Elway, then you break your arm? Maybe it is that, the way you throw a ball, or the way you catch it, or the way you kick it, or maybe you want to be known for the way you coach the people who do. Maybe it's the unique flip of the wrist that makes an omelet become a work of art. Or maybe your dream is to become the Picasso of pancakes. Maybe your dream is to be known as one who deals with difficult people, to bring them together, to create understanding, to take the worst and make it better, to take the better and make it best. What is your dream? What is your pipe dream? What is our dream as a church for this church, what is it we want to become?

This morning let us think about our dreams as a church, and then we can apply that to ourselves. If we're going to have a dream, then we're going to have to conquer the internal inhibitions that tell us our dreams are impossible. Sometimes that's our biggest problem. Sometimes, we have all these doubts. Our internal inhibitions. The voice that says to us, "I know I can't. I know I can't." Once we conquer our internal inhibitions, we stop making excuses for ourselves, and our dreams become possible. A newspaper in Canada put up some excuses that teachers had received from their students. One of them said, "I was kidnapped by aliens and interrogated for three hours, that's why I didn't make it to school today." Another student explained that the reason that he couldn't turn his essay in was because he showed it to the bus driver, and the bus driver was so taken with it, that he showed it to all the other passengers on the bus, and he never got it back. One student said, "I was mugged on the way to school. I offered him money, and my watch, and my pen knife, but all he wanted from me was my essay."

"I know I can't. I know I can't." Excuses we make for ourselves, internal inhibitions. I think sometimes we spend so much time trying to explain to people what we can't do and why we can't do it, that we would get it accomplished if we spent as much energy trying to get it done. Steve Mariucci was the coach of the San Francisco 49er football team. He said, "I never wear a watch because I always know it's now, and now is when you've got to do it." If we tell ourselves we can't, we won't. If we tell ourselves it's been tried before, we'll think it should not be tried again. If we tell ourselves that we're too weak to do it, we will get progressively weaker as we think about it. Internal inhibitions, self-fulfilled prophecies, God-denying predictions, satisfaction for less than the best, comfort in the idea that anything worth doing shouldn't be tried because if it could be done, there'd be somebody else out there doing it.

This church, over the years, had to learn. We had to learn to trust each other. Once upon a time, all the cupboards in the church were locked. All the supplies were hidden. Every group had its own stash, and they put it all over the building. I understand that, because if you couldn't get the paper plates you needed for a meeting, you didn't want to have to go out and buy them at the last minute, and so you'd hide them under one of the pews. And all the groups and all the meeting groups and all the circle groups, everybody had their own stash somewhere, because the cupboards were locked. And then one Saturday, it was

a funeral reception, and all the cupboards were locked and we couldn't get in to find the plates. And so I was looking for a crowbar, and somebody found a key, and now the doors are open, and the supplies, if you come to the church, you can get supplies, because there's plenty. Once upon a time we had signs in our parking lot that said, "If you park here, we will tow your car." Visitors will be towed away. How do you grow a church when you're towing visitors' cars to the impound lots? I don't now how you do that. So we took the signs down. Paul wrote the church and said, "We look not at what we see, but what we do not see." Paul is telling the church to look inside, to conquer your inhibitions. Look inside and see what's there. Be the church. Trust each other. Welcome guests. Look at who you are. Live the gospel you preach.

Jody Williams won the Nobel Peace Prize. She said, "I believe truth is told in the actions we take. I believe if enough ordinary people back up our desires for a better world with action, we can accomplish absolutely extraordinary things." There was a time in the church when people were afraid of controversy. There was a time in this church when we couldn't talk about things. But then our adult program kicked in, and we decided we could trust each other. Liberals could talk to conservatives and the result would be light, more than heat. And wisdom, more than division. Republicans could claim their right to opinions, and Democrats could speak up. We're a big church, and we don't have to hide in pockets of common thought where everybody thinks like we think. No, all of us can be in the same room and we can disagree in a manner that is agreeable. It's a beautiful thing. Henri Bergson called this the *elan vital*, the spark of life. It's in everybody. Robert Fulgham in his book, *What on Earth Have I Done?* wrote, "Justice, mercy, love and freedom are not the work of gods or politicians but the work of those who see the world with open eyes and who do not turn away, but address what they see."

This is a great church, because we have conquered the internal inhibitions. We have faced our fears, we have defeated our phobias, we have overcome our paranoia, we have determined we will trust each other. We will work together, we will listen to ideas, and we will learn from each other. We will be a church. That's how we have a dream. That's how we begin to have a dream come true. What we thought was impossible, is possible, and we know it, and we can make it happen.

The second thing that we've got to consider, because it's not just the internal inhibitions. There are some things out there. The external prohibitions are there. And those are the things that make our dreams improbable. The story of David, standing in front of Goliath, stood in front of the giant with nothing but a slingshot. No armor. And the giant mocked him. How many times, in one form or another, have you heard these words? "What do you think I am, a dog? That you come at me with a stick? What do you think I am a dog, that you come at me with a stick?" We've all got those Goliaths, giants, telling us what we cannot do. There's this couple. Everywhere they went, they were holding hands. Someone said to them, "The two of you are such an inspiration. You act like you're just so much in love and it brings tears to my eyes to see you there, holding hands." And she said to him "It's not love, it's the only way I can keep him from cracking his knuckles." What keeps us from cracking our knuckles?

Ted Kennedy's death reminds me of a true story that happened. Ted Kennedy, he was running for a senate seat, and of course his brother is the President and his other brother is the Attorney General, and Ted got the two of them together and he said "You know, I've got a problem, because I'm running for office here, and I just don't think it's right to cash in on our fame, and maybe, I'm thinking, I ought to change my name." And John Kennedy the President said, "What name are you going to take instead?" And Teddy looked at his brothers and he said, "I think I'll keep my first name, I mean, I'm used to that name, but I think I'll change my last name. I think from now on I'm not going to be a Kennedy any more, I'm going to change it to Roosevelt." The external prohibitions, those voices from beyond us, telling us "You cannot do it, you should not try."

Once upon a time, this church decided to confront its external prohibitions. Some said, "There isn't enough interest, or financial support, to transform the looks of the sanctuary and the education wing, and to pay off the debt from the last building project, which was the parlor. It'll never work," they said. Goliath stood in front of us, but we did it. We transformed tomorrow. But you know, we didn't finish. We renovated the sanctuary, the upstairs rooms, but we didn't build the elevator. We couldn't make the building accessible. We said we wanted to, but we couldn't do it. And so immediately we said, "Well, let's try it. Let's try to do that. Let's elevate our people." I remember the meeting. I remember hearing people say, "You've done one project, and people have supported it, and that's all you're going to get to do. Don't wear them out." And I remember the meeting. It was right here in the sanctuary, and there was this woman who was new to the church, and she stood up, and she said, "Don't you think we have a future here? And if we made a promise, don't you think we ought to keep it? To do the south entrance? To make the building accessible? And to do it right. I know we can do it. I know we can." And we did.

You may remember, about his time last year, when the economy was beginning to fail and people were wondering how's that going to affect the church? We got to the end of last year, 2008, because of the generosity of the members of this congregation we ended the year with a surplus of \$30,000. And we worried about how people could support the church, but we told everybody, if you can't do it, you can't do it. We understand. And people stepped up. And I can tell you, the business manager will tell you, this is the best position we've every been in, in September. There's a man who believed we could do anything we set out to do, and he put up \$50,000 a year for five years, into this church, for outreach ministry, because he said "Good isn't good enough. You've got to move from good to great." And there's woman in the church who is a member of the church and wasn't terribly involved in the church, not much involved, some members of the church took her in and were friends with her, and she died. And we got the letter that said she believed in our church and the leaders of the church and the directions the church was moving, and she left money for the church and, not this past Friday, but a week ago Friday, the business manager Karen and I took a check, put it in the bank, for \$350,000. Because she believed in what we're doing.

There was a church meeting when it was suggested, in the middle of the downturn of the economy, "There's no way we can build a house for somebody who has no house." But

we did it. We raised the money. We're building the house. We have met this wonderful family. We got a reputation in this town. Just ask the people at Putnam School about us, or the women in the safehouse shelter, who are the recipients of some of our gifts. Or the teenagers who get some of the scholarships that leave this church to go help them. There was a church meeting where there were people who said there's not enough money to do this Stabat Mater, this big piece on Good Friday. "We can't do that. First of all there's not enough money to do it, and secondly, it's a hard piece, the volunteer choir can't do it." We did that difficult piece of music. The money came in. The sanctuary, Good Friday, was filled.

The externals, the prohibitions, telling us we can't do it... I don't often quote Dr. Phil, but Phil McGraw has written a book entitled *Real Life*. In that book he writes, "Before you go to bed at night, every night, get a notebook or a journal and write down one miracle that you experienced that day." It could be a big miracle, like when you saw your best friend's baby that had just been born a few hours ago. That's a big miracle. Or maybe a small miracle, like when you were coming out of the grocery store and you had bags full of groceries and they were about to break, and some stranger came up and helped you. And write that down. And then, at the end of each month, go through each day and see what happened, and the rest of your days will be the best they can be. Goliath will mock us, but we will stand firm because we know how to confront our external prohibitions. We know that our dreams are not only possible, but it is clear to us they are probable. We can do it, and we will.

Third thing. You know what we begin to see? You've got to have a dream, because if you don't have a dream, how are you going to make a dream come true? Possible, probable, now inevitable. Our dreams become inevitable. I think one of the best lines in the Bible, Paul wrote it to the church, "We do not lose heart," he wrote. I think the best translation of those Greek words is, "We do not give up." We do not give up. You see, our dreams are not ours alone. Our dreams are part of a bigger goal, part of a puzzle, and we have some of the pieces. It's not just about us. Some of our dreams, it's a God thing. It's an interesting but true story, the tourist bureau in Utah trying to get people in that state to promote Utah, a promotion sponsored by a food store chain, probably Albertsons. There was a photo contest, and the theme was "Travel Utah First." And you were to send in your pictures of various parts of Utah, and there would be the selection of a winner. The "Travel Utah First" photo contest winner won an all-expense-paid trip to Hawaii.

Willie Nelson said it. "Once we replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts, we start having positive results." You never know where things can go, from Utah to Hawaii. You never know where a dream can get us, once we begin to tie into the Eternal. You never know, you never know where. It seemed impossible or improbable, it becomes inevitable. It reminds me of the congregation where the pastor was being assigned to another church and they wanted to take up an offering before he left, and the letter that was sent out to the entire congregation said, "We want to give our departing pastor a little momentum." I think they meant memento, but I've been a departing pastor about five times, and it could be momentum.

The dreams we start, where do they go, how far do they get, when will they stop? I don't know the measure of the potential of this church. But I do like what Ann Lamott wrote in her book *Plan B*. "First find a path, and a little light to see by, and then push up your sleeves and start helping." And I like what Leo Buscaglia wrote in his book *Bus Nine to Paradise*, "Life is wonderful. Joy is our birthright, and love is what it's all about." I know this church is oriented beyond itself. Never resting on our past accomplishments, but pushing forward toward tomorrow's challenges. Never worried about who gets the credit, but all of us trying to do the job, knowing none of us will get there until we all get there. Never dividing ourselves as ordained or laity with a level of hierarchy and pre-supposed power in the struggle as to who has the authority, but all of us taking authority from the only place where there is any legitimate authority, and that has authority over all of us and empowers each of us.

Cleveland Amory was right when he said what this world needs is a new kind of army, the army of the kind. An atmosphere of respect, each one doing what they're able to do, and all of us making sure to put our best effort first, because the work is important and the cause is just. Sometimes stepping in and sometime stepping back, like the basketball game in Boston. It was in important game. Time was running out. The Celtics were down two points, the time was called, a play was drawn up. Superstar Larry Bird looked at the other Celtic players and said to them and said to his coach, "Get the ball to me and everybody else get out of my way." Coach Casey Jones responded, "I'm the coach. I will call the play." And he looked at the others and said, "Now listen up. Get the ball to Larry and get out of his way."

Get our dreams connected to God and get out of God's way. Put the future of the church in the way of the Gospel, and the dream is inevitable. This church with a passion for justice like a prophet, with an inquisitive mind like Wesley, with the compassion and heart of Mother Teresa, a church with the courage of Mary, a church with the God-consciousness of Jesus... When our dreams are tied to the eternal, they're inevitable. We can build a fellowship center if that's our will. There's a way. We can begin prison ministry and provide shelter to the homeless so that they don't need to rent our roof. There's a way. We could reach out to the Hispanic community and help this whole area become a sense of one community, for all the people. There's a way. If we are not so concerned to look to be the best in the world, but employed to do the best for the world. There's a way. If we can continue to trust each other, if we can persist in knowing we are good but not great, we haven't arrived. If we conquer our internal inhibitions and confront our external prohibitions, it's possible, no, it's probable. You know, maybe it's just, maybe it's inevitable.