

DREAMING IMPOSSIBLE DREAMS

Genesis 37:2-11

Dr. J. Howard Olds

July 28, 2002

*To dream the impossible dream
To fight the unbeatable foe
To bear the unbearable sorrow
To run where the brave dare not go
To right the unrightable wrong
To love pure and chaste from afar
To try when your arms are too heavy
To reach the unreachable star.*

Those lyrics sung by Don Quixote in Man From LaMancha clearly characterize the life of Joseph, our Old Testament hero, whose story comprises the last third of the book of Genesis.

TO DREAM THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Catch this picture with me for a moment. It is breakfast time in Jacob's tent. Leah is there with her sons Rueben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, all seated in their customary places. Jacob's four sons by concubines have arrived. So has little Benjamin who always makes Jacob think of Rachel, the true love of his life. The blessing is offered. The milk is passed. Bread is served. Then, like a star whose time has come to appear on the stage, Joseph steps in and takes his seat next to Jacob as all of his half brothers roll their eyes in disgust. Joseph wastes no time in breaking the silence. "Had a dream last night, guys. We were binding sheaves of grain, when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while all of your sheaves bowed down to me." Reuben choked on his oats and the others could not believe their ears.

The very next day the same thing happens again, only this time Joseph says, "Man, I dreamed that the sun, moon, and eleven stars were all bowing down to me." This was even more than Jacob, his father, could stand, so he rebukes Joseph for such fantastic dreams. Arrogant? Absolutely. Naïve? Certainly. More than a family can tolerate? Obviously. Impossible? It would seem so, unless you know the rest of the story.

Dreams. They have been called the real windows to the soul. They reveal more about us than we tend to know. If they happen to be from God, they determine our destinies more than we could ever imagine. Don't count the dreamers out.

Henry Ford had a dream to put a horseless carriage into the hands of the common folk. He built his first car in a shed behind his house. In 1903, he formed the Ford Motor Company and produced the Model T. That year his company made 6,000 cars. Eight years later they were producing 500,000 cars a

year. Don't count the dreamers out.

The first presidential inaugural speech I remember was the speech of John F. Kennedy about a "new frontier." I was a teenager in high school at the time. I will never forget it. "If you will ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country, we will be the first generation of people to go to the moon." Just a few years later, I remember sitting in a student parsonage late at night, watching a tiny black and white television as that dream became an absolute reality. Don't count the dreamers out.

Even more important than humans walking on the moon, was the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. "that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. That one day God's children would live in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Don't count the dreamers out.

I ask you today, where have all the dreamers gone? We live in an age of cynicism, pragmatism, and getting by. Have we traded creativity for cynicism? Have we surrendered our dreams in the struggle for survival? Would we rather get by than dream high? Would we rather grab what we can instead of extend the plan of liberty and justice for all?

William Sloan Coffin said, "If we do not look for something above us, we will soon sink to something below us." The great "philosopher," Yogi Berra, once said, "If you don't know where you're going, you might wind up someplace else."

And so I say to my friends today, you adults who are here, can you still remember what you wanted to be when you were a child? Is the dream still alive? I say to my young friends who are here today, many of you who are about to go off to college and new experiences, hold on to your dreams. God-size your dreams. Nothing is impossible if, in fact, it is God's plan and design for your life. Hold on to your dreams.

TO FIGHT THE UNBEATABLE FOES

We do not treat dreamers very well, never have, never will. We learn in Verse 5 that Joseph had a dream and when he tells it to his brothers they hate him all the more. They hate him so much they throw him in a cistern and sell him to the Midianite merchants for 20 shekels of silver. They cover up the crime by concocting a lie to tell their aging father.

Martin Luther King in his sermon, "Shattered Dreams," says, "One of the most agonizing problems within our human experience is that few, if any, of us see our fondest hopes fulfilled. The hopes of our childhood, the promises of our mature years are unfinished symphonies" *in the orchestra of life.* (italics added)

The world has never treated dreamers very well. Remember the movie Jerry

McGuire? McGuire is an agent for professional athletes. One day Jerry comes to a kind of epiphany about the corruption and the practices of his firm. He issues a memo urging a more humane approach to their work. "Let's stop treating people like cattle and worrying about the bottom line and really serve our clients." All of his buddies cheer him on, saying, "You're right, Jerry, of course, you're right." When the company fires him, as they are sure to do, his so-called buddies rush to seize his clients.

The world has never treated dreamers very well. Where do dreamers find the faith to carry on? You see, your dream will be tested. There is no question about it. Most people will think it is a crazy idea and will ridicule you for it. How do people who dream keep the faith alive to pursue it? May I suggest a couple of things?

Dreamers accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite focus. Let me say that again. Dreamers accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite focus. When George Fredrick Handel became paralyzed on his right side, he also got himself so deep in debt that his creditors wanted to throw him in prison. It was at that point in his life that Handel wrote the Messiah. Who could ever forget those triumphant words of the *Hallelujah Chorus*, "And He shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah."? Dreamers never lose their divine focus.

Dreamers are the people who discover strength even in the midst of their weaknesses. Paul says in II Corinthians 12, "*I have known hunger and thirst and often gone without food. I have been cold and naked, in danger at sea and in danger in the city. Besides everything else, I was given this thorn in the flesh which torments me. But for Christ's sake I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, and persecutions, for when I am weak then I am strong.*"

God brought Joseph out of the miry clay,
God set his feet on a rock to stay.
He put a song in Joseph's heart that day,
A song of praise, hallelujah.
You can kill the dreamer, but you can't kill the dream whose time has come.

TO REACH THE UNREACHABLE STAR

When Joseph was 30 years old, he was appointed governor of Egypt and put in charge of the Department of Agriculture. When famine struck the land seven years later, Joseph managed a national and international food distribution program that literally saved the world from starvation. When Jacob heard there was food in Egypt, he said to his ten sons, "Why are you sitting around here looking at one another, bemoaning the situation? Why don't you go to Egypt and get us some food so we can live and not die?"

Genesis 42:6 says, "*And when Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, they bowed down to Joseph with their faces to the ground.*" Dream fulfilled.

When I was 18 years old, I had a dream that someday I would pastor this congregation. I did not know it was in Brentwood and I certainly did not know it was in Tennessee. But let me tell you, at 18 I knew someday I would pastor a congregation like this. Follow your dream. Follow, no matter what. Follow.

Next Sunday I will slip out of the late service a little early to travel to Louisville where I will assist your previous pastor, Bishop James King, in dedicating a new headquarters for the Kentucky Annual Conference. It has been built at Kavanaugh Life Enrichment Center. In 1976, I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the history and hope of the Kavanaugh Camp ground, which was then demolished, overgrown, abandoned, and being vandalized board by board. The theme of my thesis was "A Bishop's Dream." Follow your dream.

I received a brochure from some friends of mine this past week about a place called Wesley Retirement Village. Like all institutions, they were trying to raise money. In reading the brochure, I remembered when it all started. The year was 1986. I stood on the Annual Conference floor and pled for a multi-serviced community to be developed. When I finished my speech an attorney got up and in his attorney voice said, "I want to tell you folks today, Brother Olds' dream is going to create a nightmare for this entire Conference." Everybody applauded, but they voted the thing through anyway, which is all that really mattered.

Today, this multi-level, state of the art ministry to retired adults is recognized around the country. Follow your dream. Follow your dream. Whatever it is, follow your dream.

Don't get me wrong. I have had plenty of dreams that died at dawn for they were dreams of my own. I have wandered away from God's purpose and path and only by grace came home. But, I have had enough dreams that have come true in life to make me want to dream on. Having walked this far with a visionary God, I want to follow Him all the way home. Follow your dream.

*And the world will be better for this
That one man scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his last ounce of courage
To reach the unreachable star!*

Follow your dream. Amen.

