

“NOT CHURCH AS USUAL: I – DREAM BIG!”

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Matthew 14:13-21

A couple of days ago I was speaking to a person in our church who had recently returned from a trip to California. I asked her about all of the places they had visited, one of which was San Francisco. I visited San Francisco years and years ago, when my brother John was first in the Navy, and had a wonderful time exploring that magnificent city. I was disappointed to learn that this family in our church had not taken the tour of Alcatraz, because I had done that on my trip, and I have to tell you, that it was one of the best tours I have ever taken. It was fascinating and the guide was excellent!

That tour ranks right up there with some others I've taken in my life – like the British Museum in London where I saw the actual Handel's Messiah, the copy that George Friederic Handel actually wrote by hand; and the Wright Brothers Museum in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Compared to Alcatraz and the British Museum, the Wright Brothers Museum is a little, bitty thing, in size, at least. But it is an incredible place to visit! Every time I visit there I wonder to myself what makes it so special? Why is that tour so moving?

Well, it's because the Wright Brothers' story is so compelling, and the passion of the guides who tell it is infectious! They tell the Wright Brother's story like it changed the world – which, in fact, it did!

All of us know their story, at least the basic story – how they dreamed of being able to fly from place to place, and how they observed birds and learned from them, and how nothing or no one could stop them from pursuing that dream! A couple of years ago, David McCullough wrote a book about them, called, appropriately enough, *The Wright Brothers*, which was incredible – I highly commend it to you, and page after page told about all the things that were working against them in pursuit of their dream, but nothing would stop them – nothing! They were dreamers, and in the face of all the things that seemed to be against them, they kept on dreaming, until that dream became a reality!

My friends, I think today's Gospel lesson is Jesus inviting us to be dreamers. It's a story we've all heard many times – the feeding of the five thousand – an incredible miracle. Did you know that it's the only “miracle” story that is included

in all four Gospels? That says something, doesn't it? That tells us that every single gospel writer felt like we needed to hear it – it was so incredible, and so filled with things we needed to hear.

Well, let's hear it again this morning. Jesus and the disciples had been hard at work in the midst of great crowds, and after a while, Jesus tried to take a break and get away by himself for a little while. He hopped in a boat and went for a quiet little ride. His solitude was short lived, for the crowds heard where he went, and made a bee-line for him, so that when he came back to shore, there they were.

And so, Jesus started caring for them again – great crowds of them. Hours went by, and finally, it was evening, dinner time. The disciples came to Jesus, and said, "Let's call it a day. It's time for all of these people to go home and get some dinner."

Imagine their astonishment when Jesus thought otherwise. "No, they don't need to go away, you feed them."

Now, put yourself in the disciples' place – standing in a field with thousands of hungry people, looking down at five loaves and bread and two fish – and Jesus says, "You feed them." Maybe they thought the sun got to Jesus, and he was delirious. Surely he was joking. Impossible! Utterly impossible!

We understand their reaction, don't we? It was impossible. There was no way to feed that crowd. Five loaves and two fish simply will not feed thousands of people. It makes absolutely, positively no sense. Can't be done.

Those disciples were locked into practical, linear thinking and so are we. One plus one equals two, and five loaves and two fish do not feed thousands of people. It can't be done.

But Jesus was locked into dreaming. It could be done! Nothing is impossible! There is a way! "You might not be able to see it with the human eye, it might not look practical or doable, but I'm telling you, dream a little, there is a way!"

And so they did. We don't know how it happened, all that we know is that every single person there that day – all five thousand of those men in addition to the women and children who were there – all of them were fed – AND – there were twelve baskets full of leftovers!

It was a miracle from God, and perhaps every time a dream comes true, it's a miracle from God. Jesus invites us to be part of those miracles. He invites us as his followers to be dreamers, to see things that aren't and believe they can be; to see things as they are and dream of how they could be. Not to be so trapped into linear, practical thinking that we don't trust that God can do more, can make impossible things possible.

The great preacher and professor Howard Thurman, who was dean of the Chapels of Howard and Harvard Universities, once said, “We cannot continue to live long if the dream in the heart has perished . . . where there is no dream . . . life becomes a swamp, a dreary dead place and, deep within, our heart begins to rot.” (On-line, “Daring to Dream,” Luke Powery, 2014 Festival of Homiletics)

He’s right, or as another person put it very simply, “We dream because to dream is to live and not to dream is to die.” (Ibid)

Friends, I think this miracle story is Jesus’ invitation to us to live and to dream. I think he’s calling us, individually and as a church, to dream of ways to touch the world with his love – to change the world with his love. And I don’t know about you, but sometimes that seems to me these days to be an impossible thing. I feel like one of those disciples standing there telling Jesus all the reasons why they can’t feed those people. “Jesus, have you looked around our world today? Do you understand what we’re facing? Jesus, did you get a look at that little box on the bottom corner of a page in the Wilmington News Journal last week that said 49% of the people in the United States do not believe in God? Jesus, have you seen the news – violence, cynicism, fear, mean-spiritedness, lies, rumors, hunger, loneliness, walls going up all over the place – literally and figuratively? Jesus, do you know what we’re facing these days? Do you really think we can do something in the face of all that?”

And you know what Jesus would say – “Yes, I do. Dream a little, imagine a little, don’t let the reality scare you away. Don’t forget that we’re in this together and I am one that can make amazing, life-changing, world-changing things happen. Stop being so rational, so practical, so skeptical. Dare to dream! Trust me! Take a minute and look back at all the dreams I’ve help make come true!”

Not a bad idea, and just when I was working on this sermon, someone helped me do that. Joe Buckley sent me a link to a You Tube video that was absolutely incredible. It’s a video of a press conference with Dabo Swinney, the coach of the Clemson University football team. It’s a rather lengthy video, but Joe told me exactly what point to click on, and it was really incredible. (You Tube, Dabo Swinney Press Conference 9/13/16)

There was so much good stuff there, but some of what really stuck with me were comments that Coach Swinney made about Martin Luther King, Jr., quite the dreamer himself. He talked about King’s dream for a better world, and how hard he worked at making that happen, even though all evidence of that happening, in that day and age of the 1960’s, was quite to the contrary. Yet, King dreamed, and he dreamed until the day he died at the hands of an assassin. King dreamed because he was a child of God, a follower of Jesus, and he knew that God would one day make a way. And Swinney says, God has. He went through a litany of amazing

things that have happened in terms of race relations in this country. An African American president, African American quarterbacks in the NFL, African American CEOs, an African American Supreme Court justice. None of those things were even remote possibilities in the 1960's in this country, yet Martin Luther King dreamed anyway. He believed that God would make a way, and the dream came true. Oh, there's still far to go, but how far we've come!

My friends, Jesus calls us to be dreamers, to dream of a world that is better, where people know the love of God, where people are cared for, where hatred ceases, and love increases. He calls us to do what we can to make those things happen, and to trust that, with him, all things are possible.

So what do you think God wants us to do as a church? What dreams does he want us to pursue? I invite you to think about that in the days and weeks ahead, and if you have ideas, especially big, seemingly impossible ideas, I'd love to hear from you. You know, this church has been crazy enough in the past to do some seemingly impossible things. Gosh, we built the entire Wesley Wing during a recession. Over and over again, we give thousands and thousands of dollars each year to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering, when other churches decide times are too tough to do that right now. We go on the radio and talk about Jesus – not a Christian radio station, but a regular radio station – and talk about Jesus.

And you know what? God makes some amazing things happen. Gary Lewis was telling me that after my radio commercial aired where I talked about the drive through prayer we were offering on the first day of school, the DJs continued to talk about it after the commercial ended. They talked about what a “warm and fuzzy” thing that was for our church to do. Oh friends, in a world that's afraid to talk about Jesus, that was huge, and a little bit of God's dream came true that day!

God's love is so much bigger than any of us can grasp, and God's dreams for his people in the world may seem impossible in the face of all the evidence around us. Yet, still he calls us to dream with him and do what we can to make those dreams a reality.

You know, one day a child was in church on a communion Sunday and was worried about getting sick from taking communion. He misspoke when he asked the pastor about it, saying, “If I drink that juice, will I catch your dreams?” (Online, “A Dream So Big and Loud,” the Rev. Joe Genau, August 10, 2014)

He meant germs of course, but yeah, if we drink that juice, we will catch God's dreams. And if we read his word, and if we worship with his children, and if we believe what he said, we will catch his dreams. And if we do, who knows what might happen? So, what do you say, want to be a dreamer with Jesus? May it be so. Amen.