

# Of Dreams and Visions

## Baccalaureate Sunday and Pentecost

*Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:14-17, Luke 4:16-30*

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*Transcription of the spoken sermon*

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This is one of those full Sundays. We live by three calendars - there is the church calendar, and on that calendar, this is the day of Pentecost. But, we also live by a national calendar, and on the national calendar, this is the weekend of Memorial Day. And we have a community calendar, and for Spring Lake it is graduation day, last week it was Grand Haven's. I don't know about Fruitport or West Michigan Christian, but it is the time, at least, of commencement, and so at Christ Community, it is the celebration of Baccalaureate. As we thought about that, we realized that it was just too much to handle on any one Sunday and so our new pastor, Ian Lawton, was moved by the Holy Spirit to proclaim next Sunday Pentecost. We will have a grand Pentecost festival and I trust you will all wear red.

Because it is Baccalaureate, and I happen to have two granddaughters graduating, as well as a grandson from another university, that is Michigan State, Ian very graciously offered the pulpit to me today so that I could get in a last word, as it were.

As a matter of fact, as I thought about it, the themes of Memorial Day and Baccalaureate for me came together very easily, and I even found a biblical text with a Pentecost flavor. When you've been preaching as long as I have, you can twist almost anything to say almost anything, and so with great skill, I have woven Pentecost passages into a Baccalaureate challenge as we remember Memorial Day.

Some of us here viewed recently in this place a documentary film entitled "*The Fog of War*." The title itself speaks volumes - *The Fog of War*. The ambiguity of the human situation, the confusion and turbulence, and the fact that we often make tragic judgments that lead to horrific consequences. I'm not going to speak about that film this morning, but it is that documentary of the years of Robert McNamara who was Secretary of Defense during the Cuban missile crisis and the Vietnam conflict. I mention it because he is now 85, and as he looks into the camera, he says, "I'm 85, I've lived a long time and I've learned some things." And

I thought that's really a good excuse for my Baccalaureate sermon. I'm an old man and I found a text about old men. "Old men will dream dreams," the prophet Joel said and the Apostle Peter repeated. *Old men will dream dreams and young men and women will see visions*, and so very simply, as the rest of you listen in, although I trust there's a word for us all, this morning is about an old man's dream to inspire young men and women to become all that they can become in this critical moment in our world's history.

I did take the text from Joel, the Hebrew prophet. The prophets had a magnificent dream. We call it a Messianic Kingdom that they imaged, and *Messiah* is the Hebrew word for anointing, the anointing of the Spirit of God. The Hebrew prophets had this magnificent dream. It comes to expression in so many different ways in the writings of the prophets. It is a dream of nature in harmony, when the lion and the lamb lie down together. (I think it was Woody Allen who said, "When the lion and the lamb lie down together, the lion will sleep more soundly than the lamb.")

Nonetheless, you get the picture - the lion and the lamb bespeaking a peacefulness in the kingdom of creation where there is no longer violence or fear. And the prophet speaks of that day when they will not hurt or destroy on all God's holy mountain. The prophet Isaiah followed by Micah and Joel pick up that promise of a time when the Spirit of God will judge among the nations and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. And Micah speaks of that time when all of the nations will walk before their own God and Israel will walk before the Lord God, and every man and woman shall dwell safely under their own fig tree. Those pictures of a peaceable kingdom, pictures, images of a world that is in harmony between God and nature, nature and nature, nations and nations, people and people, is a dream. It's a magnificent dream.

It is an ancient dream. That dream is between 2500 and almost 3000 years old. It's not something that we dreamed up recently because things have unraveled for us. It's a dream that has rested intuitively in the human heart throughout the ages, from the time that the human became human, and probably began to recognize that the kind of tribalism that put everybody in peril at all times was an impossible way to live. The time when the human consciousness began to realize intuitively that there was an alternative way to be other than the way of violence and war and death and destruction. A marvelous dream of the prophets - no exploitation. You would plant a garden and eat the produce thereof. You would build a house and be able to dwell in it, not fearing that some bulldozer would knock it down.

Throughout those prophetic books, you can read over and over again that sense of an alternative world, another possibility, of a community at peace. Of course, the prophets dreamed of a world like that in terms of a God who was in control. They dreamed of a world in which eventually that God would act powerfully in the midst of history. They imaged a God who was outside of the whole created

order, the God who had called it into being, the God who still continued to guide and direct and control, the God who was the sovereign Lord of history, the God who would bring about eventually the end of time.

Well, the fullness of time saw the birth of Jesus and the community that gathered around Jesus saw in him the embodiment of that dream, they saw the enfleshment of that dream of a different kind of a world. Jesus in the days of his flesh, called people to love their enemies, to do good to those that persecuted them. Jesus overcame the conventional wisdom of the day. Jesus broke down barriers, he spoke to women, he greeted the Samaritan, he refused to be crammed into that dye cast of prejudice and dogma and ancient feuds. They looked at Jesus and they said, "This is the one."

Whether Jesus preached that sermon in Nazareth or not, I don't know, but when Luke paints the portrait of Jesus, he paints a portrait of Jesus coming to his hometown and saying, "Now, look, this is the time. The prophecy of Isaiah of that day when the Spirit of God will be poured out and captives will be set free, the blind caused to see and the lame to walk, the favorable year of the Lord, that's now. It's fulfilled in me." And, of course, such a claim ran into that conventional wisdom and that age-old prejudice of the day, because Jesus dared to suggest that the grace of God was broader than the river of Israel. Jesus used examples of the grace of God that overflowed banks of Israel and embraced all people.

They wanted to kill him for it. There is a latent anger in the human heart when those prejudices are tapped, when conventional wisdom is challenged.

Nonetheless, in the embodiment of his visions and values, Jesus was one who was followed and the community gathered around him such that in the wake of his death and resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, Peter would stand up and say, "Look, this is what it is. This is that realization of that dream. This is the pouring out of the Spirit of God that will usher in that New Age."

The mistake that the Church made was to see that embodiment of the dream in Jesus as a one-time event. And so, the community following Jesus, instead of recognizing that now into the creative process the Spirit of God had emerged into that kind of humanity which was the calling of all, set Jesus apart as one and only, as unique. But, as a matter of fact, Jesus was the embodiment of that ancient dream. He dreamed it himself, he lived it out, and while we do not have that God "out there" to come in and fix things for us, what we have learned is that God is in us, that God is that creative process that is moving this whole cosmic journey along, and that that ancient dream in the human heart of a world at peace and harmony is a dream now that must be realized, not by some returning judge from beyond the earth, but must be realized by the likes of us, you. That's my word to you today, a call from an old man who is a dreamer, for you to dream the impossible dream, and the impossible dream is a dream of a world without war.

This is Memorial Day weekend, and yesterday there was dedicated a grand memorial to the veterans of World War II. Perhaps you caught it on the television screen, old, aged veterans now with canes, wheelchairs and oxygen tanks, many of them weeping as they remembered, as some of you would weep even now as you think about those days in mid-twentieth century when the whole world was in crisis and conflict.

en years ago some of us visited Normandy Beach, looked at the bluffs that had to be scaled, where our troops were sitting pigeons. We watched the calm, undulating sea that on June 6, 1944 ran red with blood. It is a moving experience, and in those moments one senses something holy and sacred, and out of the chaos of that Second World War, there emerged the realization among our leaders that we could no longer afford war among nations, and there was a vision and a dream of a United Nations in which the conflict between peoples would be solved through discussion and conversation and compromise, empathic understanding and the yielding in order that there might be finally peace on earth.

Now, some decades later, we find that the dream is still not realized and even the vision of a United Nations has taken a serious blow, not through any foreign power, but through the miscalculation and misjudgment, the manipulation and coercion of our own government and leaders.

I want to say to you young people today the world has reached a point where we can no longer tolerate war. It was one thing when one tribe took off against another tribe. It was one thing when the world was younger and a whole village could be decimated or a whole region. But, planet earth spun on its way and most people had no knowledge of it. Do you know that half of the people who have ever lived are living today?

We have come to a point ... Mike Ackerson with your national championship in the Science Olympiad, you could devise a means by which this planet could be destroyed. We have it in our hands. We have it in our power. When I say we could no longer tolerate war, that is not just idle idealism, nor is it fluffy romanticism. It is the most hard-headed realism with which I can confront you, for if we do not change course, if we do not recognize the error of the myth of redemptive violence, that is that violence finally can achieve peace, we will come to a crisis which will get out of our hand.

What's happening in Saudi Arabia as we worship this morning? Can you not imagine the scenario which would throw the whole globe into conflict? You see, we had an opportunity in 9/11 for a wake-up call. It was a wake-up call which should have been followed by the kind of police action which would have sought to bring to justice those who perpetrated the atrocity. But, the wake-up call should have been to us who are the most powerful, affluent people in the world to

recognize that we can never be secure until the globe is secure, because we have become a global family, a global community, a global neighborhood. We should have awakened to the fact that there are those who are humiliated, hopeless, having nothing to lose, and we should have recognized that wherever there are people who have nothing to lose, the world is a dangerous place. We should have recognized that it was time to sit down with all earth's children and recognize the gulf between the haves and the have-nots, those who have everything and those who have nothing, and it was time to effect the ancient dream where everyone could plant their own garden and eat the produce, build their own house and dwell in it, have the dignity of human existence.

With all of the power and all of the resources that we have, if only we had not dreamed dreams of empire and concocted strategies by which we might maintain our dominance. But, if only we had learned from the one who stood up in Nazareth to say "Today the scripture is fulfilled in your presence." If only we had learned that it is only in dying that one comes to life, that it is only in giving one's life away that life can be possessed, that it is only in being willing to die that one can live. If only we had learned the lesson of Jesus who said God causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust, and the rain to rain on the good and the evil. If only we had recognized that we are members of one human family, that we are the human family through whom God, the Spirit, is emerging, that we look not "out there" somewhere for someone to come in and make it all happen, but rather, the God who is within us would, through us, who embodied the dream, realize an alternative world, a world at peace.

I call you young people to dream the impossible dream, to march into hell if need be for a heavenly cause.

In your insert there are the words of "The Impossible Dream," and under it a little statement from William of Orange who was the liberator of the Netherlands back in the 16th century, who said, in effect, "You don't need hope to undertake an enterprise, and you don't need success to persevere." There's something so strong about that, something so good about that.

Oh, I want you to be kids. I want you to have a ball. I want you to have fun. I want you to celebrate. But, I want you to have a vision beyond all of that. I want you to have a vision of an alternative world which may seem like an impossible dream and, in light of the history that has been written to this moment, you might say it's hopeless. But, William of Orange said you don't need hope to undertake the enterprise. You undertake the enterprise because it's right. You undertake the enterprise because it's true. You undertake the enterprise because it is imperative if there is to be a human future, if the creative process is to continue, if the human story is to move into all that it can possibly be. You don't need hope. You simply have to believe it. And you don't need success. You just need a dogged perseverance. Never give it up.

I would say to you this morning, *think critically*.

Back one hundred years ago, when I was where you are, nobody said to me think critically. They said think traditionally. I want to say to you, think critically. Don't believe your President; don't believe your political leaders; don't believe your teachers; don't believe your parents. (I make an exception for grandparents.) Don't believe them without filtering what they say and what they teach through the filter of your own mind and heart. Believe that God is in you, the Light is in you, trust that intuitive sense within you that things can be other than they are. Refuse to live by conventional wisdom. Reject the prejudices that we adults have placed upon you. Follow Jesus.

We here have achieved something. I think again of how narrow has been my focus, trying to create an alternative to church as usual, and I think we have, and I think it's good. But, I want to say to you - that's too narrow. We need to think about an alternative world and a global community which is a neighborhood filled with every race and every creed and every idiosyncrasy with the Spirit of God.

I hope that it doesn't take you as long to wake up as it took me. The best I can do is, as an old man, to dream a dream in the hopes that there's a vision that will catch on fire in you.

You are really terrific. You can change the world. God bless you. Go for it!