

A Reality Better than a Dream
Lessons: Psalm 51:1-13, Jeremiah 31:31-34

I imagine that little boy David must have been a day-dreamer. He was the youngest son of Jesse, and when his older brothers went off to war for King Saul, David was left behind. It surely wasn't the first time a parent protected the youngest. David was alone a lot, he dreamed of being a hunter, hitting trees with rocks from his sling. He dreamed of leading armies, serving the king. Look where dreams led. Goliath and Jerusalem.

It was play like children have done through the ages, like you and I have done. Children can have "wild dreams," don't we. They don't limit themselves, thank God. Their dreams are made of what is *not yet*, and they have not learned the self-imposed limits of "being realistic" like we adults have.

Daydreaming can be prayer. In the best sense, prayer is not just bowing our heads, closing our eyes, and asking God for what we want or need. Prayer is living the depth of our life - from our actions to our deepest longings - our longings with God.

I'll guess at one of David's dreams: Sometime along the way, David imagined that twelve family clans -who had lived in separate valleys for years and only agreed to work together when they were faced with a common enemy like the Philistines -would one day become the greatest nation on earth. He dreamed God would help them make it so, and God would help him make it so.

That dream beyond imagining later became a dream to unite the people by building a new holy city on ground that none of the clans owned, to bring the twelve tribes to a new place that would have great defenses against attack and strategic advantages to enrich their new life. Dreams always become plans. That dream with God's direction and David's devotion became Jerusalem, the city on a hill. And David went from beyond his dreams of King to become a Messiah/Savior in the eyes of his people.

But David had other dreams, too. Even kings get used to wanting, and he wanted what he could not have. Most kings (or presidents, or anyone) get into trouble when they get most everything they want. They start wanting what they cannot have. David had a palace full of wives and mistresses, but he wanted his best friend's wife. King's get what they want, so he ordered Uriah into a battle with inevitable death, and David moved Bathsheba into the palace.

Here's the good news in the middle of David's self-made mess. He couldn't stop dreaming. His better self would not let go of him. He tossed and turned, relived his friend dying in battle in night dreams until he saw his prize differently in the daylight. Then he wanted something he never dreamed he would have again - a clean heart! His dream was a strange kind of prayer, living his subconscious life before God, and finally he had enough faith to turn the dream into a real prayer.

Now we can hear David's very personal prayer and very public song in a different way: Listen to David's dream, his real longing before God:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit
from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Psalm 51 [NRSV]

It's not an option, really – this dreaming and praying. It is born in us. Paul was a dreamer, and prayed, too. In one of his moments of personal revelation, he says that

If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. God's Spirit does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. The Spirit knows us far better than we know ourselves, ...and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. (Romans 8, *The Message*)

How many times have you heard someone say, "I didn't sleep much last night. I had dreams." We all dream, sometimes we remember them. Dreams are powerful things.

We can lose sleep over them. The “to do” list becomes a movie; or our deep, subconscious fears come to the surface in fanciful ways that keep them alive. We are like David: our dreams, and their reminders of our life, can haunt us.

But our bad dreams are only half the story. Sometimes our dreams are really good! They put us in videos that bring our hopes and longings closer to us. They give images for our imaginings. Maybe we have great loves or core commitments or secret aspirations that we just cannot express in words, and our dreams make them almost real. We can dream great visions that we hope and pray come true.

Did you hear good news in David’s human living and Paul’s human praying? God takes all our dreams and turns them toward good. It could be anyone’s favorite verse of scripture. Romans 8:28, “In everything, God is working for good to those who love God. ...Or, every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.” Thank God!

We love God! God is working on our longings too deep for words. What are the wordless dreams of your life? What are your longings? What do you dream in the too-busyness of your too-long days? What are your longings in the loneliness and increasing limits of older age? Do you want the peace that passes understanding? Do you want a “clean heart” free of the burdens of conscience like David prayed? Do you want to see the hopes of your children become dreams come true? Have you given up on day-dreaming where you put images to your wordless imaginings?

Let me ask that another way: Have you reached the place in your life where you have put limits on what God can dream for you? I have a suggestion from King David and Paul and even Jeremiah that might be hidden from you this morning if you have given up on dreaming.

Look what we miss when we only half-listening to the lesson from scripture! Jeremiah is not the one dreaming in the section we read. It really was “The word of the Lord.”

“The day is surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant [with Northwood Church] and my church in every place. ...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

In Jesus Christ, God’s dream has become a reality! Thanks be to God!

God dreams, too! Let God dream for you. God’s dreams for you are better than any wordless longings you can have for yourself. No more bad dreams in your personal nights! No more limits from regrets and disappointments from that haunt your past! God knows your heart, and God lives there to re-create it clean and pure. God teaches you to dream big - I mean, reality BIG! God is speaking with a relentless, loving, quiet voice, and God is saying, “Let’s go after the reality that is more than you can imagine.” And God will turn divine dreams for you into a reality that is better than your dream!

I know this truth. I have not been all that good at letting God dream for me. And I look back on my life now, and every great blessing came when I gave myself to God's dream, and I let God put images to my imagination and words to my prayers. "O God, your dream be mine. Your hopes be done in me! Your will be done on my earth, and make it heaven." God's reality for me has been better than any of my dreams.

I don't know about you, but I have dreams for Northwood Presbyterian. I look past the honest analysis and evaluations we have sought to help us explain our place in the road. I look deeper than the loss of membership to the sadness of moves away and resurrections to God's presence, and the people who have decided to worship elsewhere or nowhere. I see a God who is not limited by our past or our sins. I see a God who dreams for you, even when you cannot possibly know that dream *yet!* Not having a clear image should not keep you from dreaming!

I see the new covenant right here. I see greater commitment to the new commandment Jesus gives us: to love others the way Christ loves us, to come here to learn how to love the way Christ loves. I see deeper friendships and greater ministry, because I see Christ's "grace sufficient" and "hope that does not disappoint" and "love that never lets go." I'm just your "pretend pastor," but I have been caught up in the contagious dream that God has for this congregation. And I have just enough faith and common sense to know that God's dream will become a better reality when we commit to dream God's dream for us – and we go to work on God's dream.

Let's pray that God would make it so, and we would make it so. Let's dream reality BIG! Let's imagine a church so true, so loving, so full of Spirit that the tower does not need to be lit at night, and the bells ring all the time, and the place is full up with people who have been caught up in God's dream. Let's wake up and day-dream, and each day live God's reality that is better than any of our dreams. each day for each and all of us.