



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON – PENTECOST

ACTS 2:1-21

MAY 28, 2023

“WHAT DID YOU DREAM ABOUT?”

When I was young and such a sound sleeper that no alarm clock made could make a dent in my slumber, my mom would do the honors on school days and Sundays. She'd start with a little back scratching and a phrase I quickly learned to hate – *“Time for little boys to wake up.”* Though I showed no signs of agreeing with that assessment, she would follow with *“What did you dream about?”* Even if I remembered I was rarely in the mood to tell her. Who remembers dreams? And if you do, do they matter?

Aside from what I'll call my occasional “stress dream” where I'm endlessly being chased or realize only after arriving at school or the mall I left home without putting on any clothes, or my personal (un)favorite realizing with final exams coming I haven't studied, much less shown up for class the entire semester! If any of those keep coming after retirement, I will seek therapy. But by and large, most of us have only scant recollection of our dreams.

Yet the Bible mentions them all the time. The prophets of Israel often dreamt – Daniel and Ezekiel most especially, but just about all the prophets had visions – think of them as divine daydreams. When the Lord had something big up his sleeve, he'd send a doozy of a dream to a pagan king – Pharaoh of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon most especially, and then position one of his anointed dream interpreters to be at the ready – Joseph and Daniel in these instances.

Christians are often labeled “dreamers” – and not in a positive sense! Our lesson from Acts, however, assumes that's precisely what we'll be. Quoting the OT prophet Joel, Peter said *“In those days your young men will see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.”* There are two very important phrases in this passage. The first is *“in those days...”*

To the Jews, this meant *“the end of time”* or *“the final judgement.”* When the OT prophets used it, they meant however, a period, not just a moment or a day, when God would right wrong, judge sinners and reward the righteous, if not sweeping them up into heaven, then at least delivering them from the influence of the unrighteous. *“In those days”* was Israel's fervent hope.

Christians take this phrase as spoken by Peter to mean much the same, only it will be Jesus who comes on the clouds of heaven to inaugurate, as Revelation proclaims, *“a new heaven and a new earth.”* Christians think of it “cosmically” – it won't just be good and evil separated, with good folks reigning over evil folks with evil folks getting their “just deserts” but evil will be no more – the earth will be rid of it forever, it won't even be a faint memory. Revelation 21:4 says *“Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the former things will pass away”*

The other phrase is *“see visions and dream dreams.”* The prophets often said, *“thus says the Lord”* after they had *“seen a vision or dreamed a dream.”* At Pentecost this became the gift and task of the church. We are, you might now say, God's prophet. That is not to confuse us with God's Word, Jesus. A prophet speaks what a prophet is told to speak – in the OT prophets of the Lord were referred to with a term in Hebrew which meant *“pour forth”* – as in “pass along” what was heard. False prophets on the other hand were referred to by a word which in Hebrew meant *“to rave”* – as in to rant and rave and carry on full of one's own ideas.

The church is not to “rant and rave” and carry on as if we’ve got a “better idea.” We are to “pour forth” and speak on God’s behalf what the Lord allows us to speak – we convey “authorized” speech. That is why the church, we “dreamer of dreams” is also “apostolic” – we are authorized only to “pour forth”, or “pass along” what the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension passed on and through the Holy Spirit understood to mean. That is why the church has a Bible, creeds and confessions.

But what about our license to “dream?” What do we dream about? In the larger sense, our dreams are God’s “dreams” for the world – and those “dreams” will all come true. Men and women will lose entirely the desire to define good and evil for themselves, they will submit joyfully, and I suggest with a huge sigh of relief to God’s will and God’s ways. *“In those days...”* there will be no one *“in bondage to sin and who cannot free themselves.”* But in another sense, this lesson does give license and incentive to “dream” about our lives and our churches.

What kind of man or woman would you like to be? What kind of congregation would you like to be? Not that we can make that up out of whole cloth – there is a created order to which we are in this life subject like it or not – and the church does have as a matter of first importance a commission to make disciples of all nations through baptism and teaching all that Jesus has commanded. But Pentecost also signaled a *“loosing of God’s Spirit”* on the world – those filled *‘on that day’* did things they never dreamed they would, and that it seems to me suggests we have no reason not to expect the Spirit of Jesus can change persons and renew congregations.

Personally, dare we dream of what we might become if daily we accepted and submitted ourselves to Galatians 2:20 which says, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me.”* Imagine what you can say “no” and conversely “yes” too if you did. Congregationally dare we dream, if our text from Acts be our guide, that young and old together form the church - instruments of God’s grace and stop thinking of ourselves as “aging” even if all the surveys and statistics tell us Christianity and its churches are “getting old.” Is it possible for us to stop noticing how many gray heads we have versus acne filled faces, and learn young and old together what it means to be servants of the servant King – leaning on and learning from one another as we do?

What do you dream about?

AMEN