

## “Dream On”

### Introduction

- I, Where do our dreams go? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Our answers would probably differ. Some of us have been able to keep our dreams alive, while others among us have faltered. Some of us formulated our dreams early in life and these dreams have stood up well under the test of time. Others of us, myself included, have changed our dreams along the way, sometimes quite radically. Over time, I have observed that no matter what our dreams are, there are several core qualities needed to help them come to fruition. We have to have an excitement about our dreams, a willingness to act upon them and a persistence in doing so. Those of us who are Christians have an additional resource when it comes to realizing our dreams ~ the opportunity to have energizing encounters with Jesus Christ. Often our dreams are clarified and shaped by these encounters. Again the key to bringing life to dreams ~ excitement, taking action, being persistent, and having fresh encounters with Christ. This morning I'd like to share two stories about people who held onto their dreams and brought them to life in surprising ways.
  
- II. The first story is about a man by the name of Larry Walters. This is a first rate story about a man who would not let his dream die! And I'm told the story is true. Larry lived in California and was a truck driver who had a life dream of being a pilot . . . Larry wanted to fly airplanes. When he graduated from high school Larry went to enlist in the Air Force. But he failed the physical ~ his eyesight wasn't good enough. So what he did for a living instead was to drive a truck. The closest he got to flying an airplane was to sit in his backyard lawn chair and watch the planes fly overhead.

But he never let his dreams die. One day he went to the Army-Navy store and bought a big tank of helium and 45 weather balloons. These are not your little party balloons but big balloons that measure over four feet across. He tied those 45 balloons to his lawn chair and secure that chair with a thick rope to his jeep. Then he filled these weather balloons with helium. He went into the house, got his cooler, filled it with sandwiches and drinks and tied the cooler to the side of the lawn chair. Next he got and loaded his BB gun. His plan was to go up several hundred feet and drift around. When he was finished, he'd shoot those balloons one by one with his BB gun and gently land. Those were his plans!

Well, when he sat in the chair and cut the line to the jeep he shot up like a rocket and kept going until he leveled off at 16,000 feet. He was very frightened because he knew that if he had shot those balloons his chair could capsize and he'd have a to fly literally. So he just sat and drifted. After awhile the winds moved him right into federal airspace above Long Beach airport. He was spotted by both TWA and Delta, and a pilot reported that "We are at 16,000 feet and we've just passed a man sitting in a lawn chair holding a BB gun in his lap." Can you imagine?

After shooting a few balloons he descended until the balloon's dangling cables got caught in a power line, causing a black out in a Long Beach neighborhood, but also allowing Larry to climb down to the ground. He was immediately arrested by waiting members of the LAPD. When they were taking him away, a reporter asked why he had done it, Larry replied, "A man just can't sit around and do nothing." He later remarked, "I had this dream for twenty years. . . I didn't think that by fulfilling my goal in life I'd dream -- that I would create such a stir and make people laugh."

It is important to nurture our dreams and to find ways to live them out. This keeps us excited about life. And it is very important for us as Christians to recognize the spiritual source of our dreams. In our individual and group prayers, Scripture reading, and worship together, our spiritual dreams are strengthened. In our ministry to the community, the mission trips we take, and in our ministry with our youth and our children, our dreams are re-enlivened. Dreams thrive on action and interaction.

III. Our second story is about one of the heroes of our Christian faith, the Apostle Paul. In today's reading from Acts, Paul, whose original name before God changed it was Saul, had a dream and was quite malevolent. He was determined to wipe out the early Christian church. At that time they were called "followers of the way." As we saw last week, at this time there were many signs and wonders taking place in the church and the number of Christians was growing rapidly just as it is in parts of the world today. Saul had been present at the stoning of Stephen and now was traveling to Damascus to persecute the church there. Then it all changed, just as we saw it change last week for Peter. Saul met Jesus. Remarkable, isn't it, how this keeps happening ~ folks living in fear or anger or in some other negative place meet Jesus and change.

We know what happened to Saul. He was surrounded by a flashing light and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Shocked Saul asked, "Who are you?" The response "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. Rise up, enter the city, and do as you are told." Saul, now blind, was led into Damascus where for three days he neither ate nor drank. Instead, he prayed and waited. His old malevolent dream had come crashing down around him. Our lord then sent a believer by the name of Ananias to lay hands on him. So often our help at times of crisis comes

from the Christian community. Saul was healed (something like scales fell off his eyes), was filled with the Holy Spirit, baptized, ate, and was strengthened. Our lectionary reading stops here, but what happened next is important. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once (notice at once) he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. And those who heard him were astounded and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised --- in Jerusalem among those who called on his name? And hadn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priest?' Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. Saul's dream had changed.

Can we see what happened here? Saul initially had big, destructive dreams. He was driven to destroy the church and kill Christians. But the Lord met him and turned his dreams upside down. We see next week that Paul continued to be a man of many dreams and that he applied the same vigor and commitment to these new dreams as he had the old. Except now his dreams were energized by the Holy Spirit and lived out in Christian community. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, Paul helped take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Very many years later, many of us are probably sitting here because he did.

V. Conclusion: Dream on. Our dreams as a parish and as families and individuals within the parish are vital. Two questions occur to me about our dreams: first ñ Are we so excited about being an Easter people that like Larry Walters we just won't be able to sit around and do nothing? And, second, like Paul, are we willing to encounter Christ on our own roads to Damascus and have our dreams refined and reshaped? My experiences here at Ascension lead me to believe that the answer to both questions is 'yes.' It is not our way at Ascension to sit around and do nothing, and I believe we are seeking the Spirit's guidance regularly.

So now what? What's next? We are waiting for the Holy Spirit to lead us into our next steps. We know that the Spirit will speak to us in community through one another. Next Friday and Saturday the Vestry and I will go on retreat at Grace Point. We will seek the Spirit's specific guidance about the future of our parish ñ what programs and staff do we need for our youth and children? How well are we living out the Great Commission in evangelism to those around us and those who visit us? How well are we serving the community around us and those in need among us? Where will we find the resources and the staff to do what God is calling us to do? What dreams would the Holy Spirit give us about Ascension? This I know ñ if we continue to seek the Spirit's guidance, then its guidance we will get. And when we follow the Spirit's direction, we will find ourselves soaring to new and exciting places together Alleluia. Amen.

