

## **Dare to Dream**

### **Genesis 37:1-11**

In the summer of 1776, the American Colonies confirmed their dream of independence from the British Empire with the signing of a declaration to that effect. On July 4, 1776, in the city of Philadelphia, Colony of Pennsylvania, that document was signed by the members of the First Continental Congress. It spoke of a people who dreamed of being free from tyranny, free to make their own decisions, and to determine their own destiny. This past week we celebrated the anniversary of that dream.

Since the beginning of time, people have dreamed dreams that drove them to take risks. The people of Babel dared to dream that they could build a tower to the heavens. Well, that dream didn't work out quite the way they expected. History relates the stories of men who dreamed that they would rule the world, and again those stories didn't end well. Yet there are those who dreamed dreams, like the Founding Fathers, who did achieve great things. Two of those dreamers come to mind to me today, one is Joseph from our Scripture reading and the other is Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are soon coming up on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in

Washington, D.C. Although I was only 7 years old at the time, his words have stayed with me all these years:

I say to you today, my friends.

So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama ... little Black boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Even after all these years, those words can still bring tears to my eyes. Dr. King reminds me a lot of our Bible character, Joseph. Joseph was

the “little brother”, the 11<sup>th</sup> son of his father, Jacob. As such, he had little to no real standing with his siblings or his society. Dr. King as a black man in the segregated South was considered someone of no real standing by the society in which he lived.

Joseph may not have been in high standing with either his siblings or his society, however he had a very strong sense of self-worth. He knew he was his father’s favorite son, the first-born son of his father, Jacob’s, true love, Rachel. Joseph’s father made no bones about his love for him, going so far as to give him a coat fit for royalty. This act was not lost on his brothers!

Dr. King grew up in a place where his society told him he was without worth. He had grown up hearing the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Jesus, so he knew he had worth in the eyes of the Lord. It was this knowledge that gave him the courage to challenge the societal structures of his day.

Both of these men had high aspirations for their lives, despite what their societies told them about themselves. Joseph dared to dream of rising in authority to where his own parents and brothers would find themselves bowing down to him. Dr. King had aspirations to change his world into a place where not only he and his family, but ALL people would be treated equally.

Without Divine guidance, I doubt that either of these men would have chosen the path on which their dreams would take them. After sharing his dream with his brothers, Joseph found himself sold into slavery and carried away to Egypt. Bereft of family and homeland, he made his way in a foreign land, finding favor in the eyes of men, but more importantly in the eyes of God. How often did Joseph wonder why God had given him such beautiful dreams, only to find himself a slave and a prisoner?

Dr. King, having the stories of the Bible to serve as his guide, knew that his dream was God-given. He was also aware that it could lead to a dangerous path that included being attacked by police dogs, knocked down by torrents of water rushing from fire hoses, being arrested, jailed, and even stabbed. Despite these setbacks, Dr. King continued to pursue his dream of non-violently changing the broken American social system.

Joseph and Martin Luther King, Jr., dreamed impossible dreams. But, of course, we know that nothing is impossible with God. As children of God, we, too, are called to seek the seemingly impossible goals of peace and justice for all people.

What is your dream? Joel 2:28 tells us that God said, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” Of course, that Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost and continues with us today. It is

that same Spirit that gives us dreams and visions like those that were given to the likes of Joseph, Isaiah, and Daniel. Claim the dream that God gives you.

Do you feel like your dream doesn't matter? We may believe that our dream only matters to us, that others wouldn't be interested or supportive. Of course, we can shortchange ourselves, too, with excuses as to why we can't follow our dream – we're too old or too young, uneducated, not able-bodied enough, or whatever your favorite excuse is. Joseph and Dr. King could easily have given in to feelings of insignificance given their circumstances. God's Word shows us that he uses people who were often considered insignificant in their day to achieve his purposes. Moses the fugitive murderer who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Rahab the harlot who saved the Israelite spies in Jericho and who is named in the genealogy of Jesus, David, the little brother, the shepherd boy who killed a giant and went on to become Israel's greatest king, even Jesus, the carpenter's son from Nazareth, who defeated death.

Is your dream from God? Although we may have grand dreams like Joseph and Dr. King, we need to test our dreams. Remember that Hitler and Stalin had dreams, too, but they were not the kind that are given by a Holy God. Does your dream align with Scripture? Seek the counsel of mature Christians. Pray for discernment. Start small and build on God-given successes.

Are you prepared for the hurdles that you will encounter in pursuing your dream? Jesus told us that pursuing the dreams God gives will not be easy when he said, “Blessed are you, when men shall hate you and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake.” (Luke 6:22)

There will be those like the brothers of Joseph and Dr. King’s assassin who try to kill the dreams of others. Ask God for the strength and perseverance to continue in the face of what seems to be insurmountable odds, again, because with God all things are possible.

Will you accept the call of God? Trusting fully in the power of God, Joseph and Dr. King accepted the calls on their lives to dream big dreams and work for change. Holding on to his dream, Joseph was finally elevated to a position where he helped an entire nation, as well as his own family in a time of famine. Although Dr. King was martyred for what he believed in, he trusted that God would see his dream through to its completion. We continue to pray for that day.

Today, let us each be open to the dreams that God gives to us, both individually and as a church body. When we open ourselves to God’s purpose, I believe we can then join with Dr. King in speaking these words:

“...when this happens...we will be able to speed up that day when all God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles,

Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!”

AMEN

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June 9, 2023      Hatfield Church of the Brethren