

Gospel - John 12: 20-33

5th Sunday in Lent

Sermon 3.21.21

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Jesus said, “**FOR THIS REASON I HAVE COME TO THIS HOUR.**”

Throughout the Lenten Sunday readings you have seen again and again that Jesus is on a trajectory. His goal is death and the cross, and nothing deters him from his objective—not Peter’s objections, not the buyers and sellers in the temple, not the confused nighttime questions of the Pharisee Nicodemus.

On his way in the course of his ministry Christ encounters any number of people who are not racially of Israel. He expels a demon with 6,000 heads from a wild man in region of Gadara. He heals a Samaritan leper and absolves a Samaritan woman of her eight adulteries. He heals the daughter of a Canaanite woman while witnessing her persistent faith. Acknowledging similar faith he heals the valued servant of a Roman Centurion.

Today two Greeks show up to request an audience with Jesus.

As if on cue, Christ understands his time is at hand. In accord with the Scriptures, he has already been drawing all people, not the people of Israel only. Surely soon he will be lifted up like Moses’ snake in order to be a draw for many, many more—generations to come. We ought never to underestimate drawing power of Jesus. *The hour has come for this, he says, and I have come for this hour.*

We, too, are on a certain trajectory. The pandemic has seemed to stand in our way. But I wonder if prayer and intention and God’s good grace are nonetheless very hard at work behind the scenes to help us make a way in spite of everything.

Jesus says, “For this reason I have come to this hour—to be lifted up.” We can also say, “For this reason we’ve been called to St David’s—to mix our intentions and efforts together.”

Back on January 3rd I shared with you some of my dreams for the congregation. They are not mine only. They are our collective dreams. They are written in the lines and between the lines of our Statement of Purpose and our Parish Profile.

One of our members asked me recently if I could please make a review of our unified dreams, which I’m happy to do. They are historical envisionings along with some new possibilities, as best we can collectively discern them. (By way of aside our unified dreams are the very first evidence of dreams coming true. If I have the same dreams as you, and the same, what then are the better chances of success?)

So again, to review:

I dream we are a worship space that’s healthy and happy, Covid-safe and Covid-free, filled to what-ever is state-approved capacity with God’s worshipping people. Our services are hybrid, with people in the congregation and people worshipping from home, live-streaming, as we do today.

For those who remain homebound or isolated I dream we are an avenue of human contact for prayer, for encouragement, for love, and for private Eucharist.

I dream of a beautiful, well-organized, well-ordered facility, where classrooms are filled with people, not only on a Sunday, but also on weekdays and evenings and weekends. Classes are held here. Writers groups assemble, and there are other interest groups and events involving music, drama and the arts.

Once again there are AA meetings and other recovery groups, and people are set truly free from inner demons and bondages.

I dream of us being a service center to the City of Shelton, where St David continues her legacy of community outreach in new and innovative ways, a regionally renowned center and hub of activity, activism for justice and service.

I dream we are a safe and healing space, and especially for children. Parents feel comfortable to bring their children to Sunday school or preschool or have their teens show up to afterschool study sessions or any number of weekly classes.

I dream of faith formation and catechism and adult Bible education. I dream of young people and adults who gather weekly to discuss the readings or review the Sunday sermon.

I dream of new member classes leading people of all ages to be baptized and grow in faith and purpose. I dream of youth gatherings and contemporary worship gatherings and even a place where some young people gain a sense of God's call to ministry.

I dream we are their encouragement and help provide some needed resources for a seminary education.

I dream us as a vibrant, inviting, welcoming faith community who love each other, care for one another, and keep short accounts, with no age barriers or class barriers or race barriers or gender barriers or economic barriers or political barriers or any kind of barriers.

We can't wait for the next occasion to gather for a fellowship hour or a picnic or a special dinner; or to work on a new project—sew clothing or quilt blankets or pack backpacks or distribute food or provide means of shelter and support.

I dream also that you come to realize—really understand—that *you* are God's dream; that whenever God thinks about you, which is always, God smiles, deeply gratified.

Jesus' trajectory was Jesus' dream. He dreamed the cross, the grave, the empty tomb and the redemption of humankind—all people drawn—every nation, race, kindred, tribe and tongue.

St David's trajectory is St David's dream; and St David's dream is St David's trajectory. We follow the footsteps of Jesus' dream —not any re-accomplishing of redemption of course, but most certainly in sharing fruits and benefits of his redemption in order to draw all people everywhere to join the same family.

As Christ promised his disciples power from the Holy Spirit to reach to Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth; Christ also promises the same Holy Spirit to St David to spread good news in Shelton, Mason County, Western Washington and then as far away as we can imagine.

God is not teasing us or messing around with us by giving us these dreams. God means business. "If you can dream it, you can do it." And if God can dream it and trust you to take care of God's dream, then most assuredly you can do it!

Inspiration requires action and dreaming demands doing and that dreaming and envisioning is the juice to get us going. As Goethe said, "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

I wish to now to add that dreaming demands determined planning.

Throughout the Gospels we can trace Jesus' various mission campaigns step by step. We know where he went, what he said and what he did. We know every synagogue he visited, every wedding or funeral he attended, every home, every park, every mountain or seaside, every city, every venue. The writers are clear and explicit about his words and works, where no syllable is random or miracle haphazard.

How much pre-planning was responsible for Jesus' success? 80%? 95%? 100%? The writers are more obscure about behind-the-scenes requirements and machinations of his ministry.

We catch a glimpse when we're told about how well-positioned, upper-class women handled much of his finance. We catch a glimpse when the disciples make ready Jesus' triumphal entry according to meticulous instructions. We catch a glimpse when we see Jesus prearrange details of the last supper. Even when Jesus delays to visit Lazarus, we see it as part of a prearranged plan. Every aspect of Jesus' ministry required careful, behind-the-scenes management and preparation.

As near as I can calculate the arrangements needed to build the first temple required about 30 years. King David came up with the plans and also amassed all the building materials, amount-ing to some \$56 billion dollars in today's money. Everything was prefabricated offsite, and as the Bible says, there wasn't heard so much as the sound of a hammer. It took King Solomon only 7 years to put the pieces together. The more carefully you plan, the more efficiently your plan comes together.

This present pandemic is—or should be—a time of reset, reflection and planning. In this unique, God-ordained opportunity we can make notes, draw maps, create strategies, get our finances in order, store supplies, look after our health and well-being and prepare for swift service for when the time is right and occasion arises.

Our dreams will surely come, but only when we make sure and determine plans for their successful outcomes. God extracts from us in the time of war the things we have made ready in the time of peace. Heaven is with us when we plan so that heaven can be with us when we do.

One of my favorite quotes is from the final pages Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. He offers this as one of his conclusions to his time of living alone in the woods. Thoreau says,

"I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings."

Jesus advanced confidently in the direction of his death and nothing would deter him. Nothing is impossible with God.

We, too, advance confidently toward the dreams that God has given us, where nothing, nothing absolutely nothing, is impossible with God. They are our trajectory and final objective, and we advance toward them at this time by careful thought and planning. Let us, too, allow nothing to deter us. Because for this hour, I think, we have all been brought together. Amen.