

# SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

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Text: Isaiah 40:28-31

Title: “Serving from the Heart: Dreams”

We’ve been thinking about “Serving from the Heart” the last four Sundays and as such we began considering components of an acronym, S-T-R-I-D-E or STRIDE. We began with S: Spiritual gifts. Then came T: Talents. Then R: Resources. And last Sunday we considered I: individuality. This morning we consider D: Dreams. Next week we’ll finish this series with E: Experience. But this morning, as I say, we focus on dreams which often come in the midst of tension, sometimes tension in our personal lives, sometimes in world affairs.

Most of us remember “The Cold War”, for example. It was a result of the residual tension between East and West following WWII. Names like Nikita Krushev and John Kennedy played significant roles in that war. One of the primary components of “The Cold War” was something called “Mutually Assured Destruction” or MAD. The idea was—and most of you already know this—that nations with nuclear weapons deterred each other from launching them because all involved understood that doing so meant both launching nations would be destroyed. “You kill me. I kill you. We’re both doomed. That’s our deterrent for NOT using nuclear weapons.” Of course, that’s the simplistic version.

When Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan were in the process of reducing nuclear weapons as a result of the world coming to a greater understanding that MAD was not a very stable or reliable way to nurture world peace, I had a dream. And in that dream, I saw people standing in a circle facing each other. They were people representing different cultures from all over the world. It was a relatively small circle of people, though; small enough that faces were recognizable. And in that circle, many were pointing shotguns at those on the opposite side, ready to fire at a moment’s notice, they were tense and determined. In the midst of everyone in the circle there was a mist that surrounded everyone, and somehow I knew that the mist was the Spirit of God. It became clear that everyone in that circle was dependent on that “Mist” for life. They all breathed it in. They were completely engulfed by it. Without it they would all die. And as I stood in the circle I heard God say, “Tell them I love them. Tell all of them I love them all.”

That was my dream. In the midst of frightening, on-going tensions in the world, I was given a dream that reminded me of God’s love for those with weapons threatening the lives of others.

We all know that there is no shortage of anxiety and fear in the world. If we spent some time together I’m sure we could come up with a long list of fear-producing situations in the world and in our own lives. ISIS, Ebola, terrorists, recession, debt, missing persons, cancer, and unemployment: what are some others you can think of that induce fear and anxiety? ...

So much happening in the world that can raise anxieties. As we think about serving from the heart, how do we find hope for our future, for the future? How can we ourselves find peace when there’s so much

fear and anxiety in the world?

Of course, we aren't the first people to ask that question. When the people of Israel and Judah were conquered by invading powers and suffered under the rule of foreign kings they were asking that question. They lost the ability to self-govern as soldiers from neighboring superpowers destroyed buildings and homes. They lost the familiarity of place when in Judah's case they were forced to leave their homeland and were dragged to Babylon after the kingdom of Judah fell to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Ripped from their homes and their homeland, the people languished, wondering what this all meant, wondering how "...the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" could let this happen to God's people? We can hear the people's anguish in Psalm 137:

<sup>1</sup> By the rivers of Babylon—  
there we sat down and there we wept  
when we remembered Zion. [(Another name for Jerusalem)]  
<sup>2</sup> On the willows there  
we hung up our harps.  
<sup>3</sup> For there our captors  
asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"  
<sup>4</sup> How could we sing the LORD's song  
in a foreign land?

Traumatic as this was for the people—and would be for anyone who lost home and homeland and then was forced into refugee camps of the conquering country, God has a greater perspective and God has a habit of sending dreams to those who will listen in order to instill hope in the hearts of those looking for hope, needing hope, wanting hope.

And so God sends dreams to the prophet. It's a dream reminding the people of God's everlasting, and ever-faithful power. As he considers the powerful Babylonians and their gods, the prophet asks earlier in chapter 40:

<sup>18</sup> To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with him?  
<sup>19</sup> An idol? —A workman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,  
and casts for it silver chains.  
<sup>21</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
<sup>22</sup> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;

who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;  
<sup>23</sup> who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

<sup>28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup> but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

God--the people are reminded--is the Creator, the same Creator who fashioned the earth in Genesis. Unlike the gods of their conquerors that are crafted by artisans and could be purchased at any craft fair, God cannot be created because God is The Creator and as such God stands at the beginning and the end. It is in this Creator the prophet calls the people to have hope. Though the way appears hopeless, though they have lost much, though the way is long, God the Creator, "...one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6), is worthy of hope. In fact, God is the only One worthy of our hope when it appears as if fear and anxiety have won the day. And the prophet proclaims this hope in a dream of those who have such hope renewing their strength, mounting up like eagles, running and not losing energy, walking at length without fainting from heat exhaustion or weariness, the dream of renewed hope and life given by the Creator of all. That is the dream the prophet sings.

Of course, this isn't the first dream the prophet sings. In chapter 2 another dream:

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.  
(Isaiah 2:4)

Dreams sung by prophets calling for hope, providing images of hope in the midst of fear and anxiety reminding us that though the way can seem dark and bleak, God has other ideas. The Creator did not create with the motive to destroy or to participate in destruction but rather God's desire is for peace and strength and wholeness.

On World Communion Sunday that is our shared hope, too. At least on this one day, we embody that those who seek to follow Jesus are One. As Ephesians puts it:

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

So what are your dreams? Could they possibly be a calling placed on your heart to be God's presence in the world? Dreams are about imagining what is yet to be. A dream is not usually in the present tense. It's about the future fulfillment of some unaccomplished state of being. It's about having hope in the midst of fear and anxiety. What do you hope for? What has God placed on your heart that can move that hope to become reality?

I'm thinking of dreamers today. I think of Martin Luther King, Jr. who had a dream that his "...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." We're still working on that dream.

I think of Tamara Klida who has a dream called "One Week/One Street", a dream of people coming together to renew hope in a city struggling with decay, a dream of diverse people joining together to put God's love into action and demonstrate that crime and drugs and violence are not what God wants for the people of Saginaw, but rather life and love and joy. We're still working on that dream, too.

What dreams do you have? Is it possible that as we consider serving from the heart that God is calling you to use your spiritual gifts, talents, resources, and your individuality to work toward fulfilling some dream to make God's love real? To provide hope? To improve someone's life? Maybe it's a dream to help disadvantaged children learn to read because research shows that a child who has someone who cares and reads to them does much better in school and in life than those who have no one to read to them. Maybe it's a dream to make sure those who are hungry are fed. Maybe it's a dream to care for women and children who have suffered abuses. Maybe it's a dream to create a group for men who can come together and be open and honest with one another about common struggles and mutual support. Maybe it's a dream to be God's instrument in another country as a missionary. What dreams do you have?

I'd like you to consider whether or not God may be nudging you to shape your life in ways that live into whatever dream God may have given you.

God has a history of providing dreams to those in the midst of fear and anxiety because they provide hope. It's when we trust in the God of dreams that we find and live in hope offered by the One who is not the created but the Creator of all who is "...above all and through all and in all."