

# Dream On

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Sermon for Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2010, Acts 2:1-21

As most of you know, my ears perk up every time Iowa is mentioned in the news, so I paid attention a couple of weeks ago when it was announced that a certain farm in Iowa was for sale. Of course, there are always farms for sale in Iowa. So why was this particular farm up for sale national news? Well, this farm, located near Dyersville, Iowa, on the western edge of Dubuque County, which hugs the Mississippi. The farm is 193 acres, and includes a two bedroom house and six outbuildings. Oh yes, and one more thing, it has a baseball field.

The presence of a baseball field is the reason that the Lansing family, who is selling the farm, have an asking price in 4.5 -5 million dollar range. A lot of money for a baseball field, you say? This is no ordinary baseball field. Tens of thousands have come to see it, bringing balls and gloves and bats, to play catch or to hit a few. It is a field (and farm) made famous by a movie in 1988. The movie lent its name to the field. It is called, "The Field of Dreams."

It is hard to explain the persistent popularity of the movie or the field as a tourist attraction. What keeps drawing people to an out-of-the-way small town in Iowa 22 years after the movie appeared in theaters? No one knows for sure, I guess, but I think it has something to do with a search for something akin to sacred space. In sacred spaces, you feel a connection not only to the sacred but to generations past and future who have stood and will stand in the same place. Sacred space frees the imagination, allows us to think about and hope for a world that is different . . . better. Sacred space allows us to dream dreams.

Last week we celebrated May as Older Adult Month by having the older adults give the leadership to our service. And as they did, I was thinking ahead to this Sunday, this scripture and the promise it contains for older persons. As Pentecost unfolded, it fell to Peter to offer an explanation to the baffled onlookers. Peter quoted the prophet Joel, who had written:

"In the last days, it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, sometimes called the "birthday of the church," I wanted for us to take some time to think about seeing visions and dreaming dreams. If you stop to think about it, there is nothing too surprising about young men seeing visions. Young men see "visions" all the time, visions of their futures, visions of the world as they hope it will be, or how they intend to make it when the old guard yields and lets them take over. It is only natural for young people to think in terms of, "Some day, I going to do so-and-so," or, "When my generation is running things, the world is going to be better."

But life has a way of reducing your enthusiasm and curtailing your capacity to see "visions." The longer you live, the less the future is your concern. When you are 15, you take it for granted that some day you'll be 50, and you think about what the world will be like when you are. But when you're 50, you know that there is a good chance that you might not make it to 85, and that if you do, you might be limited in your ability to do things and go places. So you don't spend as much time thinking about what it will be like in 35 years from now. The future belongs to the young, they say, and that becomes more literally true year by year.

Life experiences also tend to teach you that it isn't as easy to change the world as you

thought it was when you were younger. The world changes, alright, but seldom in the ways you intend or want it to change. Life is a humbling experience. You come to know that you don't have the power to do what you may have thought you could do. So why dream dreams? Instead, lower your expectations. Be realistic.

From a strictly human point of view, that's the advice I would give. But as the Apostle Paul wrote in one of his letters, we who are in Christ Jesus no longer see the world merely from a human point of view. The Spirit has been poured out on us, and among the faithful, even those of advanced age continue to "dream dreams."

Something special happened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month at Mills College in Oakland, California. Hazel Soares graduated with a degree in art history. What makes that special is that Hazel is 94 years old. Oh, and in case you are wondering, that only makes her the second oldest college graduate on record. First place belongs to Nola Ochs of Kansas, who graduated three years ago at 95 and this year received her master's degree from Fort Hays State University at the age of 98! Both Hazel and Nola lived a lifetime before they even got to start college, but they never stopped dreaming that they could and would.

Still, they are newsworthy because they are the exception. Most people give up on their dreams much earlier in life. And to some degree, the church, at least the church in the United States, has given up dreaming of a better world. The church has become content to provide spiritual care and entertainment for its own members, and to do a little charity for outsiders. Many churches see their primary role as that of protecting and preserving the past, rather than dreaming about the future. And if they do dream about the future, they tend to dream about their own future, a bigger congregation, a more impressive building, more church programs.

When the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, however, the dreams being dreamed weren't about creating a big institution the purpose of which was to address the wants and needs of its members. The dreams being dreamed were about a new world coming, about a world changed by God, that they were called to announce and help create. And many of those dreams came true, at least in part. The Christian movement became one in which women and slaves could be leaders, something almost unheard of in the world before Pentecost. And the Christian movement became famous and much admired for its willingness to care for widows and orphans, not only its own, but others.

It was the custom of the time among the pagans to take unwanted infants out to the town dump and leave them there in a kind of "swap shop." Anyone who wanted one could take one. Christians did. They took a lot of them, and took care of them, fed them, raised them. People noticed. And when people got sick, many pagans fled to avoid contagion. But Christians stayed, and took care of the sick again, their own and others. Plagues killed thousands of Christians who stayed to care for others, but they were replaced quickly by those who recovered because the Christians cared for them. People noticed that Christians were different, and came to admire them.

The early Christians dreamed dreams of a better world, and then they set out to help make their dreams come true. And with God's help, they succeeded. Now it is our turn. The Spirit is still being poured out. We should be dreaming, and doing.

I've been keeping an eye on the black raspberry canes that grow along the edge of my yard. They have blossomed and set fruit. Now, in a few weeks, the berries will ripen and I will pick them. There are also blackberry canes, just now starting to bloom. The blackberries will

come along about a month after the black raspberries. But the blooms remind me of one of my favorite poems by Richard Wilbur. It is called "Blackberries for Amelia," and it goes like this:

Fringing the woods, the stone walls, and the lanes,  
Old thickets everywhere have come alive,  
Their new leaves reaching out in fans of five  
From tangles overarched by this year's canes.

They have their flowers, too, it being June,  
And here or there in brambled dark-and-light  
Are small, five-petalled blooms of chalky white,  
As random-clustered and as loosely strewn

As the far stars, of which we are now told  
That ever faster do they bolt away,  
And that a night may come in which, some say,  
We shall have only blackness to behold.

I have no time for any change so great,  
But I shall see the August weather spur  
Berries to ripen where the flowers were --  
Dark berries, savage-sweet and worth the wait --

And there will come the moment to be quick  
And save some from the birds, and I shall need  
Two pails, old clothes in which to stain and bleed,  
And a grandchild to talk with while we pick.

The poet's dream is a modest one' simply to pick blackberries in the company of a grandchild. But at least he dreams dreams. Do we? We should, and they should be much more bold than his. The Spirit poured out upon us enables us to dream the dreams of God, dreams of a better world, not another world, but this one, better, a world of love and justice and peace. A world where every child is wanted. A world where everyone who is sick has someone to care for them. A world where everyone who is hungry has something to eat and everyone who is lonely can find a friend.

This is Pentecost, a day for dreaming. Will you dream with me?  
Amen.