

2014_12_14 Advent 3
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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In Your Dreams – the LORD Brings Back the Captivity of Zion

Psalm 126

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Psalm 126

A Song of Ascents.

- 1 When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
- 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
- 3 The Lord has done great things for us,
And we are glad.
- 4 Bring back our captivity, O Lord,
As the streams in the South.
- 5 Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
- 6 He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

We pray, O LORD, proclaim to us the good news of liberty and salvation through Jesus Christ and give us hearts to believe it. Amen.

In Jesus name, dear fellow members of Zion, beloved of God,

A New York Times Poll reports that only 64% of Americans still believe in the American Dream. Its the lowest in 2 decades. But just what is the American Dream? Notice how they define it; they define the American Dream as the ability to start poor and work hard to become rich. So is that true? Is that your dream? What are your dreams?

Today we explore what the psalmist means when he says ... “When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream.” You must be dreaming. Somebody pinch me. But no dream. God changes everything – from sorrow to joy,

from sowing seeds in a dry desert of tears to a fruitful field of joy. He makes dreams come true. But in order to understand what this really means – we need to dream; to dream God’s dream and imagine the future He has created for us in His word. Today we dream of the day when the LORD brings back the captivity of Zion.

Maybe your dreams are not the American dream. Maybe you are not caught up in idea that life is about working hard and becoming rich. But you have other dreams. You have dreams about what your life might be, could be, should be.

A young couple imagines building a future together – you and her, the kids, dinners together, one big happy family. They want to get married and start having kids right away. He is a carpenter and plans to run his own business. So they dream of building their first house to live in; one with a big back yard and a swimming pool; a nice neighborhood with a playground down the street. She’ll stay at home while he goes to work and in the evenings they’ll sit down to nice family dinners together. They dream of a happy future together. But the economy took a bad turn about the time they got married. He struggles to drum up business for his construction company. In order to have that house they dreamed of, she’ll have to go to work. They’ll both have to work full time jobs to cover the costs. No dinners together. But at least they can still have the pool. Maybe. And a voice says, “In your dreams.”

A high schooler dreams and imagines herself graduating high school becoming a great musician. People tell her she has a great voice; she’s been in musicals and sung in the choir at church; and she plays the piano beautifully. She imagines her big break; a day when she will be discovered, when that will be her on the Voice and she will land a big recording deal. She dreams of becoming famous. Unfortunately, the big break came in another way. A broken spirit. She finds out that there are a lot of great singers out there in the world and they all want to become famous. Auditions are harder to come by than she thought and after playing bars and weddings on and off for 10 years, your dreams have faded away. You have a family now and kids who need you. And a voice says, “In your dreams.”

A child dreams and imagines life as a superhero. He imagines being strong enough to withstand the world’s worst enemies. He imagines being fast enough to save the damsel tied to the train tracks. He dreams of being a superhero. But on his 6th birthday, he discovers it is beyond his abilities. His mom and dad sit him down and explain how mom has gotten is sick. She’s got something called cancer. She is going to die. And suddenly he realizes that the world’s enemies are much stronger than he will ever be. He discovers that the train is coming much faster than he imagined and he’ll never get to the damsel in time. And a voice says, “Yeah right, in your dreams.”

People tell you to make your dreams come true. Simply set your mind to it. If you set your mind to what you want, you can do anything; you can make your dreams come true. Maybe you're dreams are not to become rich, but some other hope for the future. Well, what happens when you set your mind to it, put all your effort toward it, but for all you do, nothing seems to work out the way you imagined it? Life has a way of crushing our dreams. Bringing us back to earth. Back to reality. Circumstances; choices; people; abilities – we are limited. It leaves us defeated and held captive to that sarcastic voice in our head saying to us, “in your dreams.”

It turns out your dreams were not God's dreams.

The nation of Israel had its own dreams. They imagined the day when their kingdom would become what God had promised. They imagined becoming a great and powerful nation. They dreamed of the day when a great king would sit on the throne of David once again, one who was exalted above all other kings and all other nations. They dreamt of fruitful fields, huge houses, riches pouring out of the Temple treasury. And they were sure the day had finally come.

Some have suggested that this psalm was written shortly after the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon. God had done a great thing. He had done something virtually unheard of in the history of the world. He had rescued a whole nation from captivity and returned them to their homeland. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, thousands of miles from their homeland, the Persians toppled the Babylonian Empire and Cyrus, the great king of Persia, ordered the captive Israelites to be returned home. Surely the days of redemption had come and God would bring a King like King David to once again sit on the throne in Jerusalem.

But sometimes, dreams don't work out the way we imagine. They returned to a land which was devastated by war. Foreigners had moved into their homes and taken over their property. The walls of Jerusalem and the Temple were in rubble and there was little money to do anything about it. Meager harvests had left the poor especially impoverished. Families struggled to find a place to live; the people struggled to survive. And the oppression from surrounding nations would not end. Foreign power would continue to control them – from the Persians to the Greeks to the Romans, they would never be totally free.

So what is God doing? He was supposed to free them from their burdens, fix them, restore their power and kingdom. He was supposed to make them a great and powerful nation. It was their dream. They dreamt about what their life might be, could

be, should be; but circumstances; choices; people; abilities – it leaves them defeated, held captive to reality; captive to that sarcastic voice, saying, “in your dreams.”

It turns out their dreams were not God’s dreams.

So maybe our dreams need to change. Maybe we should not be thinking in terms of what life in this world might be, could be, should be.

The captivity of Zion is not about our earthly poverty or troubles. The real captivity is either when we look for God to accomplish our self-made dreams; or when we don’t trust Him to accomplish His own dreams. This is our spiritual poverty. Sin is what leads us to come up with false dreams and false hopes in what our life might be; could be; should be. Sin is what corrupts and ruins our dreams and then makes us bitter about it; sin is what makes us want to see things work out the way we imagined it, rather than the way God imagined it.

“Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South.” This is the prayer of Zion. We are praying for God to free us, but giving us Christ. Christ is the freedom God brings. Belonging to Zion is not about our earthly dreams, it is about heavenly dreams – it is about dreaming God’s dreams. This psalm is all about Christ.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ... To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ... to raise up the former desolations and repair the ruined cities.” (Isaiah 61:1ff).

God has a dream; and in it, He imagines a King would sit on the throne of David and His kingdom coming to earth; fruitful fields and restored cities... But sometimes dreams don’t work out the way we imagined.

He comes in tears of suffering. There is no room for him in the inn. His parents are poor Mary and Joseph. He is born in a barn. And He dies on a cross. But this was God’s dream; a dream whereby His kingdom would come and the captives would be free. So He came to Joseph in a dream saying, “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Christ frees us from sin. He liberates us from bondage to self-made dreams of what we might be; could be; should be – and instead makes us realize what we really are: sinners

in need of redemption. Christ frees us to trust His promises, no matter the circumstances, the choices, the people, or the abilities. He frees us – to be content with the circumstances; to be forgiven for the bad choices; to forgive others for what they've done; to be thankful for whatever abilities we do have. He frees us to dream God's dreams. And in those dreams – you are free. He brings back the captivity of Zion and frees you to hope not in the things of this life, but in the future God is working; a future which will be revealed in the time God has appointed; a joy that will not be full until the final harvest.

“Those who sow in tears; shall reap in joy.” You scatter your seed on dry ground; you try to cultivate a desert wasteland; and for all you do, for all you do sow God's word among the fields; for all you do to scatter your lives and efforts for the Lord – it never seems to turn out the way you imagine. But that is just the point. These are not our dreams and the results are not ours to accomplish. So it is ok to cry; we should shed tears over the sad state of our lives, our sins; and the sad state of this world. We should mourn in repentance; in hope of the forgiveness that Christ has won and the redemption that He brings – for in these tears, streams burst forth in the desert. THose who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” You are like those in a dream, who sees the final outcome. you cry become as streams in the desert, which water the earth and in the LORD's good work and purpose will return a harvest. You will doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you.

This psalm is about the final redemption. Some have seen this psalm applying to Israel when they returned from captivity in Babylon. But this psalm is about so much more. For that redemption was only a small glimpse of what God was imagining. “The LORD has done great things for us and we are glad.” In our dreams yes, but some dreams come true.

A family dreams of building a future together – one big happy family, and it comes true. They decide that the best thing to do is to move into an apartment for now. He decides to give up the business and work full time as a builder for a bigger company. And with the more consistent paychecks and by cutting a few things out of the budget, she is able to stay home. He works steadier hours. Sure it was not their dream, they don't have the big back yard with the pool and playground – but they can eat their dinners and have their devotions together every evening as a family. They have found contentment with the circumstances and by dreaming God's dreams, they are free.

A young girl dreams of becoming a musician, and her dreams come true. Not in the way she first imagined. Now that she's a mother and wife, she knows her dreams are in her kids. And she teaches them to sing hymns. She teaches them play an instrument.

And they get involved at church, in the choir, singing and playing. She is thankful for the abilities and responsibilities she's been given and by dreaming God's dreams, she is free.

A child dreams of becoming a super hero and it comes true. Even though he can't defeat cancer with his super powers, he can defeat it in another way. By believing he will see her again. By hoping in what Jesus has done and trusting that God will raise her from the dead on the last day. So he out-runs the train and gets to damsel in time when he tells his mom – "don't be afraid, Jesus is with you." And by dreaming God's dreams, the boy, his parents, and all who put their trust in Jesus are free.

6 *He who continually goes forth weeping,
 Bearing seed for sowing,
 Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
 Bringing his sheaves with him.*

God does make dreams come true. He takes what was only a dream and makes it a reality. He has dreamt for us – of a day where there is no more sorrow or sighing. Where there is no more sinning or dying. "In your dreams," yes, but in dreams which come true. God has changed everything – from sorrow to joy, from sowing seeds in a dry desert of tears to a fruitful field of joy, from the death of His own Son to the resurrection and final redemption of all creation. What makes all the difference in the world is understanding that the Christian faith is not about making your own dreams come true, but its about seeing God's dreams come true. This is something worth dreaming about. It is something God wants you to dream about. So go ahead and dream – dream of the day when the LORD brings back the captivity of Zion. Amen.