

Impossible Dreams A Hole in the Church

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This morning we continue with our series of messages entitled “Impossible Dreams.” It is virtually impossible to think that we can make a difference in the overwhelming problems in our world. If we try to make a difference in our strength and power we will fail. But we are not dreaming about what we can do. We are dreaming about God can do through us. “All things are possible with God.” We want to hear his heart. We want to be busy about things that matter to him. We want his Spirit and power to flow through us to transform the world. God is calling us to step out of our comfort zone and join with him in his work of redeeming the world. We are at a defining moment in our lives and in our church. Will we choose to stay comfortable or move out our comfort zones trusting God? Jesus told a parable about a man who chose to stay comfortable.

Luke 12:16-21

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.
¹⁷He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'
¹⁸"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'
²⁰"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'
²¹"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Do we see the world as God sees it? Or do we see the world as we want to see it? How does God see the world? In the Bible God reveals to us how he sees the world. God created the world to be a paradise described in Genesis as the Garden of Eden. He intended for his world to be a place where we lived in harmony with him, with ourselves, with each other and with the environment. He intended a world of abundance for everyone. In order to experience life as God intended, it required that we follow the Creator's plan. Instead we chose to be our own God and to follow our own plan. In our attempt to the run the world, we released disharmony, violence, injustice, suffering and death. We destroyed God's beautiful creation. When God looks at our world, his heart breaks. He intended such a wonderful life for us. Instead he weeps at the pain and

suffering he sees in the world. He loved the world so much, that he sent his only son to redeem the world and restore it to the paradise he intended it to be. He offers the free gift of forgiveness and healing to all who will trust in his Son as their Savior. He invites those who are experiencing a relationship with his Son to join with him in redeeming his world. Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God sees a broken and hurting world that he is eager to redeem.

Do we see ourselves as God sees us? Do we see ourselves as a self-made man or woman who does not need God? Do we see ourselves as so broken that God could not possibly use us? Do we see ourselves as blessed, favored by God because we are so special? God sees us as flawed and broken but with tremendous potential when we place our lives under his Lordship. God sees that often we are blind to the things that matter to him. We are focused on our own comfort and security. We ignore those who are suffering around us and especially those who are suffering in distant lands. I wonder if God sees us as self-absorbed. Does God see us much like the wealthy farmer in the parable who said to himself: "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry"? He stored up things for himself but was not rich toward God. The farmer was blessed in order that he might be a blessing to others. However, he chose to stockpile those blessings for himself rather than to use them to bless others. Notice Jesus does not say it is wrong to be rich. He said it is wrong to not be rich toward God. God may bless us abundantly and he does so in order that we may bless others abundantly. Why do we not give? One reason is because we do not really see the reality of the needs of others. And we probably don't want to. We choose to be blind. If we don't see the problems then we don't have to do anything about them. If we see the problems we know we need to do something. We need to pray that God will open our eyes to see people as he sees them.

Every alcoholic who attends an AA meeting starts his comments with these words: "My name is Bill, and I'm an alcoholic." It breaks the denial by admitting upfront his problem. We need to do the same. We need to ask God to break our denial and admit upfront our blindness to see the world. "My name is Bill and I am blind to the injustices and sins of omission I commit every day. Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, to see the world as you see it. Let my heart be broken by the things that break your heart." God sees us all as sinners saved by his grace. He sees the tremendous potential within us to make a difference in our world, if we will just open our eyes.

Do we see our church as God sees us? I wonder what God sees when he looks at LakeRidge United Methodist Church? I think he sees a church that he loves and that he has blessed tremendously. I think he sees that we have a lot of wonderful ministries and opportunities for people to grow spiritually. I think he sees many wonderful places where people care for one another. I think he sees that we do some wonderful things in our community. We participate in many wonderful outreach ministries to the homeless, the hungry and the hurting. But I also think he sees that we have barely tapped into our potential. The outreach of our church is one of many things we do. Outreach is a negotiable commitment for many of us. God sees that we could do so much more. We could really make a difference in our community and in our world if each of us asked, "God, what do you want me to do to join with you in redeeming the world?" He is not asking us to abandon our small groups, our bible studies, our children's or youth ministry. He wants us to experience a balance between caring for each other and reaching out beyond ourselves. We can do both/and. God has so much that he wants to do through LakeRidge United Methodist Church. I think God sees us as living far below our potential.

Do we see our resources as God sees them? Many of us feel that we are entitled to whatever comes our way. I have worked hard for it. I deserve it. It is mine to do with as I

please. The Bible reveals to us that everything we have is a gift from God. Listen to the words of Moses to the children of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Moses knew they would soon forget that God had given them the land and its abundance. They would begin to think that they had done it themselves:

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. **Deuteronomy 8:17-18**

Everything we have is a gift from God. We are not entitled to it; we have been entrusted with it. Rich Stearns in [The Hole in Our Gospel](#) suggests that we would be very upset with a stock broker who took our money and used it for himself rather than investing it for us. This is what Bernie Madoff did. God has entrusted his money to us. And yet we have taken his money and used it for ourselves. God is generous and he wants us to enjoy the blessings he has given us. But he also wants us to invest a significant portion of what he has entrusted to us in his work of redeeming the world. We are to invest in things that will restore the harmony he intended for the world. How would we use our resources differently, if we saw them the way God sees them?

What if each of us began to prayerfully ask, "Am I doing things that matter to God with my time, resources, experience and work?" God wants to us everything he has given us, not just our money. There is something that he has uniquely equipped you to do to make a difference in the world. Not everyone will go with a mission team to Africa—though some will. Not everyone will serve in a soup kitchen—though some will. Not everyone will swing a hammer or paint brush for Habitat for Humanity but some will. The important thing is that each of us does something. Margaret is dreaming about a women's center where classes will be offered for women in transition giving them a hand up and out of difficult situations. These will include classes on money management, self-esteem and how to interview for a job. Margaret is uniquely using her gifts and experience to help women in

transition to succeed. There are so many different things you can do. Each of us is to ask God to put a dream on our hearts. Imagine the power of 4,000 of us working together in a variety of ways to impact our community and world! We can do so much more together than we could by working on our own.

Next Sunday you will be given an opportunity to identify one thing you will do in the next 90 days to make a difference for the kingdom of God. Some of you will choose to join with existing ministries. Some of you might want to consider being part of our prison ministry. I want you to hear from some of our members who are visiting those who are in prison.

Video: Simple Acts Prison Ministries

Others will have new ideas for ministry. We want to link together persons who have similar dreams. Please do not start a ministry by yourself. We want you to get a team of at least 4 persons to launch a new ministry. How do you find these persons? Talk with friends and co-workers about your dream. See if any of them share your passion for this ministry. Go to our blog and share your dream. Invite others to contact you who might have the same passion. One couple has expressed interest in going to Africa—would you want to go on a mission trip with them? Another person wants to learn Spanish to prepare for ministry to Spanish speaking persons. Would you want to learn Spanish? Another church members has expressed interest in supporting “Nothing but Nets” to provide mosquito nets to protect children from Malaria. Contact a staff member and talk about your dream. Brainstorm about persons who might be potential team members.

I also want to encourage existing groups to talk and pray together about God might want your group to do. Representatives from a Sunday school class contacted me about opportunities they might do as a group. They are considering various options they might do as group.

Next Sunday you will also be given an opportunity to make an estimate of giving to our mission fund. We are barely making operating expenses on the current level of giving, so please do not take away from your regular giving to operating budget or building fund. We want to continue to provide quality ministries and care for our members. Consider things you might sacrifice to give to make a difference in the world. Consider fasting and giving \$5 a week saved from meal expense. Ask God to put on your heart an amount to give and trust him to provide that in the next 12 months. See how he provides.

Wouldn't it be great if we raised \$100,000 to provide clean water to a village in Africa? Wouldn't it be great if we could build an orphanage for some of the 10 million orphans who have no place to live? Wouldn't it be great if we could routinely send medical, construction and agricultural teams to help transform a village?

Much of the world is struggling desperately for survival. God has given to the church the resources to eliminate much of the needless suffering in our world. We are at a defining moment in world history for the church of Jesus Christ. Will we choose to make a difference in the world? Or will we ignore those who are suffering? Rich Stearns put it to us straight: "The heart and soul of the Church of Jesus Christ, the very integrity of our faith and our relevance in the world hang in the balance."

Jesus encountered a man with leprosy who "begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean'." Mark 1:41. Leprosy was the AIDS of its day. These persons were considered disgusting, untouchable. "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." His heart was not with filled with fear, judgment, or indifference. Jesus was filled with compassion and he touched the man. A man who had not been touched with love in years. "I am willing," Jesus said. "Be clean."

Persons in our world are crying out asking us if we are willing to help. Are you willing?