

Messages from Genesis
“Here Comes This Dreamer!”

Joseph was a dreamer...a visionary! Joseph was the youngest of Jacob’s 12 sons. Truth is, he was the favorite. Jacob loved Joseph the most, because he was born when Jacob was old.

If you think about it, having favorites among the children seemed to be a family trait! Remember, Jacob's parents – Isaac and Rebekah – each had their favorites. Jacob himself was Rebekah's favored son. Now he shows that a favoritism with his son Joseph! His brothers sensed this, and resented it! "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:4).

Several of Joseph’s dreams only add to the problem: he dreams that he and his brothers are binding sheaves. His sheaf stood upright, and theirs gathered around his and bowed down to his. The brothers could see that this dream meant that someday Jacob would rule over them. How do they react? "His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said" (Genesis 37:8).

Then Joseph dreamed that the sun, moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to him – meaning that his father, mother and brothers would all bow down to him. Again, the brothers react in an understandable way. “So his brothers were jealous of him” (verse 11). No surprise there! Both dreams came true – but it was hard for his brothers, and father, to accept.

Sometime later the brothers are out pasturing the flock in a place called Dotham. Joseph is sent by his father to go to them, check out how they're doing, and report back to his dad. As he approaches his brothers in the field, they spot him, and they say, “Here comes this dreamer...” (Genesis 37:19). “Here comes this dreamer.” *Are you a dreamer?*

Now that can be a bad rap on a person! Someone who's lazy, spends too much time goofing off and day-dreaming. Or a person who talks big, has all these grandiose, unrealistic ambitions, and we say, “Yeah, what a dreamer he (she) is!”

But the world needs people who are dreamers and visionaries...people who think outside the box, anticipate the future, envision what others can't imagine! When Ted Kennedy gave the eulogy at his brother Robert Kennedy's funeral he included these words in describing his brother: “Some men see things as they are, and ask why. I dream things that never were, and ask, why not?” (Actually, this was a quote from George Bernard Shaw). *I like that: Some...see things that are, and ask why. I dream things that never were, and ask, why not?*

We desperately need men and women who can dream things that never were! *Our nation needs leaders who are creative thinkers and visionaries.* Many Americans have lost faith in our government – often for good reason. Instead of working together to bring about creative solutions to the nation's issues, members of both parties get stuck in their ideologies – and blame those of the other party for everything that isn't going well!

Remember that memorable speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington, shortly before his death? “I have a dream...” he roared, where he laid out his dream of a nation where white children and black children could go to the same school, where *every* American would be treated with dignity and respect. Can we pray that God would raise up more *visionary leaders* like him!

The business world needs dreamers! Imaginative, inventive entrepreneurs. Some maintain that the business world has far too many *managers*, and not enough *visionary leaders*. Remember the late Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple. From what I've read, he had a lot of personal flaws, but he had an amazing ability to anticipate the future, and be well ahead of his time. I think experience shows that private enterprise, free of government control, can usually get a lot more done and give us a lot more for the money, than government run projects and government bureaucracies!

Some of us, personally, need to dream new dreams for ourselves. It's so easy, especially as we get older, to settle into a monotonous routine, to give up any kind of dreams we might have had for a better life.

When I was growing up I had a next door neighbor who was several years older than me. He graduated from F&M, got a well-paying job as an accountant. I talked to him a few years after he was out in the work world. He had already become cynical and jaded in his outlook on life. He admitted that he once had lofty goals, but he had already lost his vision of conquering the world. Sure, part of this is just growing up and adjusting to the real world. But does that mean we give up all hope of doing something inventive, creative, of making a difference in some way?

Nancy and I have some friends from a previous church that we would get together with a couple of times a year. The one time they talked about one of their grandkids. Jessica was 23 at the time, and was just starting college. She said how she decided that it was about time she began to have a goal in life! Keeping up to date with her on Facebook, she has accomplished quite a number of worthwhile things!

How many marriages have grown stale, flat? Perhaps the pressure of finances, the stress of raising children, the constant awareness of the partner's shortcomings, have taken a toll. And the couple think things will never change. But people *can change* if they want to, and love *can be rekindled* if both partners are willing to work on themselves and work on their marriage.

Others have gone through difficult times – the loss of a spouse, divorce, job loss, and everything seems bleak. They can't envision a future that's going to be any better than the present. But dreams and hope can be reborn, if we trust in God, and look to the future, and not just the past.

And, yes, we desperately need dreamers and visionaries in the church!

We need *pastors* who will be visionary leaders in their congregations. Many pastors, like me, were trained to be shepherds of the flock, caretakers of the members and institution. We were not challenged or trained to be creative leaders who regularly cast a vision for the congregation.

But we also need *church members and leaders* who dream dreams for their church! We can't do church like we did in 1950, or 1980, or even 2005. The world and our culture are rapidly changing. We can't even, in some ways, do church like we did *prior to COVID*.

Thom Rainer is a church consultant, who heads up an organization called Church Answers. He says how a lot of churches are dying because members are focusing on the minutia, unimportant things. He tells this story: "As a favor to a local pastor, I met with the few remaining members of his church. For some odd reason, the pastor was convinced they would listen to me and get serious about doing whatever it takes to survive. After I made an impassioned plea for the church to become a Great Commission (i.e. an evangelistic) force in the community, the pastor asked if there were any questions. One woman asked with a bit of an edge, "Will we have to read the hymns on a screen?" The church closed its doors seven months later."

Most, if not all, of the churches that are thriving and making a difference in the lives of people and communities, are led by pastors and church leaders who are dreamers, and can inspire their church to find new ways of reaching this generation with the gospel.

"Here comes this dreamer..." Joseph's brothers, with contempt, labelled him a dreamer. But the world desperately needs people who can see things that never were, and say "Why not?" Just a few more thoughts related to Joseph's dreams.

Dreamers are often ridiculed and opposed. The content of Joseph's dreams wasn't pleasant for his brothers to hear. They were going to serve Joseph. "Are you indeed to reign over us?" they mocked. Often when visionary leaders share their insights, few are sympathetic to them. It may not be what we want to hear: "What you're doing isn't working." "You need to change!" The crowd, the majority of people, often lack imagination. Small-minded people can't tolerate the big ideas and dreams of movers and shakers.

Robert Fulton, the inventor, was a native of Lancaster County. When this visionary thinker showed off his new invention, the steamboat, skeptics were crowded on the bank yelling, "It'll never start; it'll never start!" But it did. It got going, with a lot of cranking and groaning, and as it made its way down the river, the skeptics were quiet for a brief moment. Then they started shouting, "It'll never stop; it'll never stop!"

In some congregations, some very creative pastors are frustrated and blocked because people in the church don't want to change. And adventurous lay people in the church can be dismayed because many are content with the way things are. I think of a family that started attending a church I served. They had moved from California. Looking back, I now see how their experiences in their church in California put them ahead of where we were in churches on the east coast. They seemed to like me, but they talked about the "inertia" in our congregation. We put them in leadership positions, but their new ideas got little positive response. They soon left the church. It broke my heart. It stung. But, looking back, I wish I had been more enthusiastic and supportive of their newer ideas.

Joseph was hated for his dreams. But in the end, Joseph's dreams did materialize. And those who criticized and attacked him were proven wrong!

Then too, our dreams and visions for the future need to be rooted in God. Joseph's dreams came from God. God gave him the gift of interpreting dreams.

Unfortunately, some of the most creative and visionary thinkers are not Christians; they don't have the mind of Christ. They may not even have any moral integrity. Ever received a phone call, or a text or email, from a scammer? It's all over the place, isn't it? Do you think these scammers are stupid? No, they're able to stay one step ahead of the law most of the time. With every new thing that comes out, they already have devised a way of tricking people, deceiving people. When you look at films, or what you find on the internet, some very creative and visionary people are able to produce products and venues that degrade life, and run counter to decency and Christian moral principles. Some use all their creativity just for selfish ends – to make a ton of money. *So our dreams need to be linked to God and His will!*

Joseph's brothers saw him coming, and with disdain and disgust said, “Here comes this dreamer...”(Genesis 37:19).

While visionary thinking can be used for evil, we need so much to have people who are dreamers, who, instead of complaining about the way things are, can see things that never were, and say "Why not?"

Where do you need a new focus for your life? To get out of a rut? To believe God can create for you a bright future? To stop focusing so much on the past and dream big dreams for a future?

"Here comes this dreamer," Joseph's brothers complained. I wouldn't mind if, when I walked into a room, someone looked at me and said, “Here comes this dreamer...”! In fact, I'd like that very much!

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