

“Discovering Your Purpose”

(Dare to Dream: Week# 2)

Ephesians 4: 11- 15 (NIV)

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.



Reflection on the Word:

1. How do you define the roles that Christ gave?
 - Apostle
 - Evangelist
 - Pastor
 - Teacher
2. Which of these roles are influenced by the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible? Which roles would be new concepts?
3. What does it mean that “the body of Christ may be built up to reach unity in faith?”
4. What does the “fulness of Christ” look like?

Family Time or Small Group (Better Together) Discussion:

1. Have you ever had a God dream? A dream in which God is calling you into service.
2. How is the Holy Spirit helping you to discover your service role?
3. What is your role in God’s kingdom and what are you doing to grow in this role?
4. How can I pray for you?

Sermon Series Resources- “A Road Called Service” based on Micah 6:6-8 by Rev. Daniel Guenther

- 1) Dare to Dream: Creating a God- Sized Mission Statement for Your Life; Mike Slaughter; Abingdon Press, 2013.

Series Progression: “Dreaming the Dream” based on Genesis 28:10-22 by Rev. Daniel Guenther

If you walked up to a random person on the street and asked them “How would you describe Christians?” I bet you’d get a variety of responses. But today, I have a particular word in mind that might be used to describe us: ‘Foolish.’ I’ll say that again, ‘foolish.’ Now to be clear, I don’t agree with this position. But I do hope that, if someone came up to me and said “You’re foolish for being a Christian” I would say “Thank you!” Because it’s a tried and true element of our faith that, when the stakes are high, we always chose the path or pick the person who, in just about any scenario, should logically be expected to disappoint. This tradition very nearly begins with the subject of our passage for today, a man named Jacob. Unlike his twin brother, Esau, who was an exceptionally skilled hunter, Jacob had done nothing to distinguish himself or display any notable talents by the point we meet him. He’s kinda just a guy, taking up space in Abraham’s family tree.

Of course, by the time we get to him, Jacob has done something to ‘distinguish’ himself, though not in a way any of us would appreciate. In our passage, Jacob is running for his life. See, his father Isaac was very old, and Jacob wanted his father to bless him and, in doing so, make him the next head of the family, before the old man died. The problem was that Isaac intended to bless Esau. So Jacob, taking advantage of his father’s blindness, pretended to be Esau, and lied to his blind father when he was asked, point blank, “Are you Esau?” Jacob secured the blessing, but when Esau found out, he vowed revenge for this betrayal, and Jacob had to run away to save his skin. At the point that we encounter Jacob, he is notable because he is a liar who took advantage of his father to steal from his brother. Not a great resume.

This makes Jacob’s next moment all the more surprising. By this point, Jacob is alone, and he’s asleep, and all of a sudden, God comes to him in a dream. A ladder is let down joining earth and heaven. Angels are on the ladder, coming and going as they please. God is standing above the ladder. Promising to make the descendants of this ordinary man into a great nation, and to never abandon this ordinary man, this liar, this thief, before this great nation comes into being. And you can tell this is life-changing stuff because of how Jacob acts when he wakes up. Earlier in the story, when Jacob was trying to deceive his father, he makes a statement about God to Isaac. Except that when he speaks, Jacob refers to God as “The LORD your God.” Not his God, your God. Now, here he is, erecting a shrine to God as well as committing his life and a tenth of his wealth to God for the rest of time. It’s in this moment that a man who’s only distinctive traits were his willingness and ability to lie begins to take his place as a descendent of Abraham and the next great patriarch of Israel.

Here’s another cool part of the dream: there’s one little phrase that God throws into that promise to Jacob. God tells Jacob that “In you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” This dream that Jacob has is now about much more than Jacob. It’s about all the families of the earth. So this dream makes Jacob a patriarch, but now he’s also an enlisted man. He’s now destined to play a role in God’s grand master plan to bless, and to save, the entire world.

Have you ever had a dream like this? I know I have. Maybe not exactly in this way, but I have similarly been convicted of the sense that God has big plans for us. And I have also been convicted that I have a part to play in those plans. Christian author Mike Slaughter might call that experience receiving a “Big, Hairy, Audacious God-purpose.” Because like Jacob, we are being called by God today. And like Jacob, we are having big, world saving dreams implanted in our hearts. Mike Slaughter writes about being convicted in a dream that he needed to lead his church in working to end hunger in Sudan. Maybe you’ve had similar desires and hopes. Maybe you’ve looked at the world and said, “Hey, this thing I’m seeing should be different.” You don’t have to be reacting to a socioeconomic problem in a faraway place, necessarily, to have had that experience. These God-sized dreams are always connected to this notion that we should love our God and our neighbors, and they’re always, always, massive. So big that they stretch and twist and pull us until we feel like we might snap.

Now, you might be thinking “Why would I want a goal to stretch me when I’m already stretched as thin as I can go?” We’re always faced by the reality that the dreams God sends us, whatever they are, often come at an inconvenient time, and are almost always connected to big, complex, daunting realities. The kind of things we think of as belonging to the qualified professionals, while we struggle with challenges closer to home. You know what I mean, I’m sure. Maybe you’re dealing with retirement savings, or medical bills or student loans or mortgage payments. Maybe you’re dealing with ‘bills’ of another sort. Things like fixing a marriage, or repairing a relationship with a family member, or overcoming an unexpected diagnosis, or helping your kids figure out how to handle bullies. As we go through life, it can often feel like we do so with a blindfold on, always struggling to figure out what challenges are in front of us and how we can respond to them. So it can be tough to hold onto the big dreams God sends us. At a certain point, even talking about these things starts to sound illogical. Naive. Foolish...

But the truth is, the witness of scripture constantly points us in the direction of appearing foolish. Of dreaming of impossible things. Of betting on the underdog every chance we get. Jacob embracing his lineage and becoming a true patriarch, the Israelite slaves escaping from Egypt, David beating Goliath, Jesus rising from the grave, a fisherman named Peter and a Pharisee named Saul founding the church? From an outsider’s perspective, it’s foolish to even think these things could happen.

Fortunately, we have inside knowledge. Because we know that, while it’s generally a good idea to bet against a liar and a thief, it’s generally a very, very bad idea to bet against God. God is the XFactor. The wildcard. The ace in the hole who takes the logical outcome of a situation and turns it upside down. God is the One who looks at an unimportant, undistinguished man and says “We’ve got this.” God is the One who, when it’s all out on the table and the ‘normal’ people run for cover, says that mighty Egyptian chariots, Philistine giants, Roman legions, death itself, none of these stand a chance when God is in the other corner of the ring.

And this same God is the one calling out to us now, even though we are already stressed, tired, and worried. God gives us big dreams and begs us to chase them. And yes, this does seem a little daunting at first. But if we dare to take a chance, if we dare to move forward in faith, we will discover that we don’t do so alone. Because when we do this, we do more than change our lifestyles and accept new obligations. What we are saying each time we dare to dream is that we are taking God’s side in the arc of history. That God’s kingdom will come and God’s will will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. So go out. Think big. Dare to dream. And if, at any point, you start to feel like you’re being foolish, you’re probably on the right track. Amen.

A Prayer:

Holy God, guide us this day as we seek to discern the God- dream you have planted inside each of us. Help us to see how our God- dream will honor you, bless others in real and substantial ways, and bring us a sense of fulfilment and joy as your will is done here on earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, we pray. Amen.

- adapted from Martha Bettis Gee

The Sermon:

Sometimes, the preaching calendar just isn't fair.

Last week, Pastor Daniel was able to kickoff a new sermon series called *Dare to Dream* and he did so in fabulous fashion. He talked about the big idea that God has a big plan for you. God has a big purpose. God wants you to dream and to dream big!

Dream like Jacob and ... expect God to show up. Expect God to use you to do great things for this is God's desire for you. The Lord spoke to the prophet Jeremiah once with these words:

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you."

- Jeremiah 29: 11- 14

These words were meant to encourage all of Israel and to let them know that God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a promise of a great and influential nation, was still very much alive and well. The dream was and is still alive.

Dream O Israel. Dare to dream big!

And that is the problem isn't it? We don't dare to dream big. We play it safe. Close to the vest. Measure every response. Calculate. Cut short the dream.

We don't embrace the **BHAG**. The **BHAG** that Pastor Daniel introduced last week and the acronym that Pastor Mike Slaughter uses throughout his book *Dare to Dream*. And just what might the **BHAG** be? Simply put, the **BHAG** is the **Big Hairy Audacious God** purpose. A **BHAG**- big, hairy, audacious, God purpose for you and a **BHAG**- big, hairy, audacious, God purpose for me.

And like I said earlier, sometimes, the preaching calendar just isn't fair.

Pastor Daniel was able to speak to you about the big and I ...

Well, it isn't fair. I get to preach about the hairy.

That's right.

The pastor with the least amount of hair gets to speak about the hairy.

And that is scary, or should I say hairy for quite often the hairy isn't about a full head of hair, like good looking Pastor Daniel, but rather a soul needing to be filled with God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit. A soul needing to trust in God's purpose. A soul needing to lay aside their own purpose and embrace the **BHAG** and the plan that God has for us. Not always easy for our own desires often get in the way and we need to be groomed to see and embrace something bigger.

One of my favorite gospel stories and a perfect illustration for what I am talking about is found in the gospel of John, the fourteenth chapter. Here Jesus is trying to help the disciples embrace their **BHAG**- their big, hairy, audacious, God purpose. And when he talks about his coming death and resurrection; God's big plan of salvation, ..., well the situation gets a bit hairy. Un-charted waters and Philip tries his best. Listen to his response and listen to what Jesus lays out before the disciples.

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

- John 14: 8- 12

What was “hairy” for Philip was the unknown. What is often “hairy” for us is the unknown too. But God has great plans for us. Nothing is impossible with God. (Luke 1: 37) And because Jesus went to the Father, after his resurrection, believe that your BHAG- your big, hairy, audacious, God purpose will include an even greater work-- miracles, healings, the spiritually dead coming alive, being born again and yes ... even the transformation of the world so that no one misses out on the grace of God!

Believe it for Jesus Christ has equipped you and I, the Church, to be the body of Christ for the world.

Which brings me to our passage this morning. (I know you were wondering when we were going to get to it.) Often this passage is used to set roles in the church-- apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers. But the *Dare to Dream* book makes an interesting observation. Where did Paul, the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians, get these roles? They weren’t part of his faith tradition of rabbi’s, priests, and scholars of the law. The prophets hadn’t spoken for years. So, where did he get this idea that there would be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to build up the body of Christ?

Well, it has something to do with Jesus going to the Father and what that really means. When Jesus returned to the Father, he promised a gift, an advocate, a teacher and a helper. He promised the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit to live inside of you and me. God’s Spirit to take the hairy ... the scary and unknown ... and give to us the means to move mountains. Give us the way to be a light that shines in the darkness. Give us a way to overcome all evil and oppression; to speak truth in love. Defend the weak and be a voice for the poor.

My friends, the Holy Spirit has come!

The Holy Spirit spoke to Paul and gave him the roles and the words to write for the Ephesians and for us. The Holy Spirit’s desire is to see “all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” And the Holy Spirit is at work in you that you might discover your BHAG and role in God’s kingdom.

And though it may seem hairy ... dare yourself to dream it. Dare yourself to be open to it. Dare yourself to become full ... full of the Holy Spirit. And with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, may you discover your role in God’s world and transform your community, street, home, your workplace ... maybe even the world so that no one misses hearing and seeing God’s grace at work. Amen!

Thought for the Week Ahead:

“The purpose of our lives is to add value to the people of this generation and those that follow.”

- R. Buckminster Fuller