

Drawn In - Dream: Luke 4:13-21

Norwalk Christian Church, January 27, 2019, Epiphany 3, Year C, Series Partly-Lectionary

All creation began with a dream. A dream in the mind of God. And God spoke that dream and all creation came into existence. God dreamed of suns and moons, palm trees and blueberry bushes, duck-billed platypuses and emus, and you and me and all the other billions of people who have and will live.

God is the ultimate dreamer.

In High School, my class took a “Science Trip” to Walt Disney World. And yes, it was more fun than science, but because it had the aire of science, we got to do a behind the scenes tour of Disney World. We saw how they make ghosts in the haunted mansion, what Space Mountain looks like with the lights on, and we got to meet some of Disney’s Imagineers.

That’s the term Walt Disney came up with for his artists, engineers, and designers who make these environments in Disney Parks come to life. They are given free reign to dream up anything and everything. They are allowed to make mistakes. To try things out. To experiment and fail and do it again. Their job is to imagine and then to create what they imagine.

And because of the creativity of these imagineers, whole worlds were created, movies came to life, and dreams became destinations.

One of these imagineers was Bucky Fuller. He imagined and created that ginormous golf-ball like dome in Epcot Center known as Spaceship Earth. And Fuller popularized what is known as “design science.” He observed in science, how scientists would have theories and work then to prove them. Their imagination would begin the process, then they would test it.

So, he started to do this in design. When he imagined Spaceship Earth, he didn’t know how to create it. But he dreamt it first, then figured it out next. It wasn’t even possible when he first designed it. But soon, technology caught up to his vision, and the dream became a reality.

What if...what if God is the ultimate imagineer? What if God has dreamt of a world, a world that may not yet be possible, a world still in formation and still being created, and we are God’s team of imagineers, making it happen?

What if God is not just the ultimate visionary, but also the ultimate risk taker--risking it all, even, to become human, in order to expand our imagination of what the world could become?

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives us a glimpse into God's dream for our world. In our scripture for today, Jesus is preaching for the first time in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. Imagine a college kid showing back home after being gone for a few years. He's grown up, but they still remember who he was. They all had expectations for him, some of them he lived up to and some of them he did not.

And Jesus stands up in front of the hometown crowd, mom and dad, aunts and uncles, sabbath school teachers, and neighbors--he stands up before them all and preaches. You can imagine they're all so proud of Jesus. Some of the dear old women who saw him grow up probably want to pinch his cheeks.

But then, Jesus gets to dreaming. "The spirit of the Lord is on me," he preaches, "Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." Everyone in the crowd that Sabbath day knows this passage--Jesus is quoting the Prophet Isaiah, but he's speaking as if the words are about him.

"He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

He shares God's dream. And then he stops. He rolls up the scroll from which he was reading. All eyes were on Jesus. And he says to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

It's an audacious claim. Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Jesus goes on to paint God's dream. In the words that follow our scripture, Jesus reminds them of two old stories, one of the prophet Elijah, who ministered to the widow in Zarephath, and one of Elijah's protégé Elisha, who cleansed Naaman the Syrian from leprosy (vv. 25-27).

Those stories sound sweet and harmless to us today, but in Jesus' time they had an edge: see, in these stories God's prophets helped foreigners. To drive the point home, Jesus tells his aunts and uncles, his old Sabbath School teacher, that there were plenty of starving widows in Israel in Elijah's day, but the widow God sent Elijah to save was an outsider. See, God was dreaming bigger than just one nation. God was dreaming for the entire human race.

Perhaps it doesn't even need to be said, but the response to Jesus' sermon wasn't great. In fact, those sweet old ladies ran him out of the synagogue and tried to throw him off a cliff.

And that's the thing about Jesus' ministry. Jesus isn't just playing lip service to God's dream for the world. He actually expects them--us--to expand our own vision, to dream God's dream with him, for ourselves and for our world, and then, to go out and do something about it!

When we dream God's dream with Jesus, it will challenge us. We may find ourselves entering new territory. Serving people we never would have talked to before. Loving people. Forgiving actions done to us. Experimenting. Risk-taking. Taking a step into the unknown and doing something we never would've dreamt we would do.

But that's how it is with dreaming. Dreaming isn't about the world as it is--dreaming is about the world as it should be. Dreaming sees the canvas--this world, our church, our own lives--and imagines what could be painted onto that canvas. Dreaming sees the lump of clay and imagines the pot. Dreaming sees keys on a piano and imagines a song.

Dreaming sees a life and imagines reconciliation. Dreaming sees a church and imagines renewal. Dreaming--imagining--this is God's spirit alive within us.

But we can't just dream. Dreaming imagines the world, then, like those Imagineers at Walt Disney World who dream up things that aren't even possible, we must go out and create the tools to make it possible.

So Jesus has imagined a world for us. A world where captives are released. Where sight is recovered. Where the oppressed are set free. Where good news is preached to the poor. Jesus imagines it, then goes out and fulfills it. Every story in the rest of the Gospel is Jesus living out that vision. And then, you flip to the book of Acts, written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, and you see the church doing the exact same thing as Jesus did--living out that vision for the world in Christian community.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon those gathered and sets loose this fire of creativity that we've called the church. The church is God's medium. We are God's paint brushes, God's clay--we are the tools through which God achieves God's great dream.

And your own creativity--that is a gift of God. And I'm talking about those of you who may have artistic creativity--but I'm also talking about so much more.

I'm talking about the guy in our church who drove around on Wednesday after the big snow storm, looking for driveways to plow so he could be of help. I'm talking about the woman who volunteered to paint this canvas each week for our sermon series so we can have a artistic visual. I'm talking about the youth group member who is dreaming of a service project to the poor in our community as a way of earning his Eagle Scout rank.

I'm talking about you and me and all of us, finding our "sweet spot", or as we say in church, our "calling". That thing we can do well that brings light and love and goodness into the world. Small or big, that way we can serve, that is true to who we are and who we know we are called to be.

What is your "calling"?

What can you dream? What world do you envision, and can you hear God calling you to join with God to make it happen?

In so many ways, we are the hands of God, bringing goodness into the world. God's spirit flows through us, becoming alive through our actions. And whether you know it or not, whether you admit to it or not, you are creative. You are, after all, created by God in God's image. The great creator created you to create. The great imagineer imagined you, so that you can imagine with God a new world.

How will you create goodness? How will you bring the vision to life?

Every time you do--every time you live into your calling--it can also be said of you as it was said of Jesus--today, in your life through your actions, your calling--the great dream of God is being fulfilled in your hearing. Scripture fulfilled by you.

Amen.