

“Fruitful Dreaming”

Genesis 28:10-19

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Today’s sermon has something to do with our dreams. There are two different kinds of dreams: the first one is a dream in our sleep, and the other is a strong desire of what we want to be and what we hope to accomplish in the future. In our Scripture reading, Jacob had a dream in his sleep. Have you ever experienced a dream where there’s something that you are struggling to attain or something you desire? Where all of sudden it appeared in your dream and finally you think you have what you wanted or the opposite, maybe it’s false information? When I was a high school student, I still remember that I got some answers for math problems in my dream that I was working on, but most of them were not the right answers!

In Korean culture, if you dream about a pig or dragon, it is a great sign of having a good fortune soon. Unfortunately, I have never dreamed about pig. I even never dreamed about eating Pork Chops at a restaurant! Some people believe that dreams have fixed meanings, saying, “If you dream about oranges, it means good health; if you dream about onions, it means hard work,” and so on. Do you believe in dreaming?

Personally, I rarely dream, but a week ago, I had a dream during a short nap. That dream was very funny and silly when I woke up and thought about it. In my dream, I was a gardener, and I planted a small tree in my backyard. This tree became a big and tall tree bearing much fruit. I was so pleased. One interesting thing was that this tree had many different kinds of fruits. Can you interpret what it means? It may have many meanings behind my consciousness or nothing! Sometimes a dream is a just dream!

It has been three weeks since I was appointed to Fair Oaks United Methodist Church. For now, the Fair Oaks pictorial directory is my study book. I always bring a picture directory with me and try to memorize members of our congregation’s names. Last week, I told one of church members “Give me two months, I will memorize everyone’s names” A little later, I realized that we have 175 memberships and average 110 people attend every Sunday service. There are more people than I imagined! Probably, I need to withdraw my promise. I better say that “Just be patient with me until I’m more accustomed to this church, and then I will remember people’s names.” Obviously, this new appointment to Fair Oaks faith community is a huge shift in my ministry journey. It is a holy stress to me!! Maybe, this may is related to my dream that I had a week ago.

If you agree that our daily dreams can project our eagerness and desperate needs to the objects in our dreams, this will help us to understand why Jacob had a dream of God’s appearance to him, especially during sleep on the road. What is the key sentence in our scripture reading? God promises two things to Jacob in his dream. See verse 15: The first one is that “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.” And the other is: “Know

that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Jacob was Isaac's second born twin. His older twin brother was Esau. However, since Esau was the first son to their father, Isaac, Jacob couldn't be an heir of his father's blessing according to Jewish tradition. Jacob also wanted to receive father's blessing, but there was no way. The story behind today's text shows that Jacob plotted with his mother, Rebekah. He put fake hair on his arms and body looking like his old twin brother Esau. He pretended to be the first-born Esau and took the blessing from his father, Isaac. The father, Isaac, granted the right of blessing to Jacob by his mistake! Can you imagine Esau's anger toward his younger brother? Once it was done, it could not be reversed. So Esau tried to chase off his brother Jacob and tried to kill him.

Today's story describes a scene where Jacob left his hometown and went towards his uncle's house in Haran avoiding his brother, Esau's attack. He had an ambition and passion for his goal, but now he had lost his family and home - even the blessing that he stole from his brother was about to be gone. What is left for him? Nothing was left around him. He was tired and exhausted in his journey in life. It seems that he had lost everything. There was no hope remaining in him. He left his town helpless and hopeless as he walked into a dark tunnel in his life. People remember Jacob as a cheater, but God promises him that God will give him a blessing: offspring and safety everywhere he goes. God will be with him! What a blessing he is given!

What will be the best blessing to you? I believe that God's presence and blessing will be the best gift for you. Jacob didn't give up in the midst of suffering and hardship. We know that Jacob was able to go back home thirty years later after he had worked like a slave at his uncle's house. He finally reconciled with his brother Esau when he became an old person in his later life. I believe that God favored him because he was persistent in his will. Every time I see Jacob, he reminds me of a model of person who has a "passion" and "never-give up will" in life, but "passion" sometimes comes along with "suffering"

If you look up a definition of 'Passion' in the dictionary, it is defined as "any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, as love or hate." In our Christian faith, "passion" means "the suffering of Jesus Christ leading up to the Crucifixion" The core of passion contains "compelling" power to drive your head, heart and put you in action. Jesus Christ, the son of God, showed his passion for us; he was willing to die for us because he was compelled to love us that much. He confirmed God's love with us through his death and resurrection. It was a choice of suffering, but it was the only way that we are saved and accepted by the grace of God.

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ or disciples of Jesus Christ? It means that we are the people who pursue Christ's passion and dream for the world. John Wesley said that "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power." The fear that John Wesley had was not losing a form of religion, but the fear was losing a passion in our hearts. In the early movement of Methodism, the Methodist was not a friendly name, rather it was a ridiculous name for John Wesley's followers. But Methodist people didn't care because they had a fire in their hearts. Methodism was a 'movement' led by lay people (not pastors). The movement was to be driven by the power of 'passion' and 'enthusiasm'.

Do you still remember your dream of what you wanted to be when you were a teenager or a passionate college student? When I was a college student, I loved John Lennon's song, "Imagine". There is a message, saying: "Imagine there's no countries/ No need for greed or hunger/Nothing to kill or die for/ And no religion too/ Imagine all the people/ Living life in peace I wonder if you can/ You may say that I'm a dreamer/ But I'm not the only one/ I hope someday you'll join us." I dreamt of becoming a peace-maker for the broken world. Our United Methodist Church mission statement says, "Make the disciples of Jesus Christ for transformation of the world." I am still dreaming to be a disciple for a better world as a child of God.

When I married my wife four years ago, I asked one of my church members who had been married for 60 years about the secret of a long, fruitful marriage. His answer was simple: "Tenacity", "Do not give up!" Jacob was a passionate, enthusiastic and tenacious person who wouldn't give up, but he kept on it until he reaches it in the end! What is your passion? What is your dream for this church? Do you have tenacity in your dream? I believe that Fair Oaks United Methodist Church has many things to continue to carry out. Last Sunday, our reconciling service was a brave and courageous a step forward to the future of our conference and for the future of United Methodist Church through revision of the Book of Discipline through our General Conference next year. What else is FOUMC dreaming? I imagine that if I compare Fair Oaks United Methodist Church to a huge fruit tree which can bear much fruit in five or ten years later. How much fruit can FOUMC bear in five years or ten years with Pastor Jeong?

Bishop Robert Schnase, resident Bishop of the Missouri Conference, talks about five signs of fruitful congregation. The first is "Passionate Worship", secondly, "Radical hospitality", thirdly, "Extravagant generosity", fourthly "Intentional faith development" and finally "Risk taking mission." What I dream for our church is that we build a faith community where anyone is welcome and accepted in the grace and love of God. When I met some people individually in this congregation, I asked them one proud thing about this church that they could share with me. Everyone says that our church is very welcoming and caring: This is what I encourage you to continue carry on. This is what "radical hospitality" means. It is not only for one another among us, but it also extends to new visitors and even the unchurched people in our Fair Oaks community.

Passionate worship means that people can discover passion in Christ, and they have a great compassion for the world through our worship. For our intentional faith development, I hope that we can continue to grow more and more through active small group ministry for the congregation, reconnecting to our young people through more active Sunday school and revitalizing our youth ministry until we bear more fruit in our Fair Oaks fruit tree. It doesn't have to be same fruits: God already invested in us with different talents and gifts. I hope that we can share our gifts through giving and serving for the mission of Christ. I dream that we are not only building up one another as a happy family, but we can go beyond our local church making more disciples and leaders so that we can serve others for the kingdom of God. Our dream should be a big one not a small one.

Reconciling is not only for working on gender or sexuality issues in our conference and in our society, it also should include reconciling all pieces of brokenness back to the wholeness in God. In order to make our dream come true, our passion must be alive. We should be dreamers. We should not be afraid because God will be with us. Do

you remember what God promised to Jacob in his dream? God still speaks to us with same promise: “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” I believe that God’s plan will be fulfilled through you and me, and through this church in our dreams and our hopes. Amen.