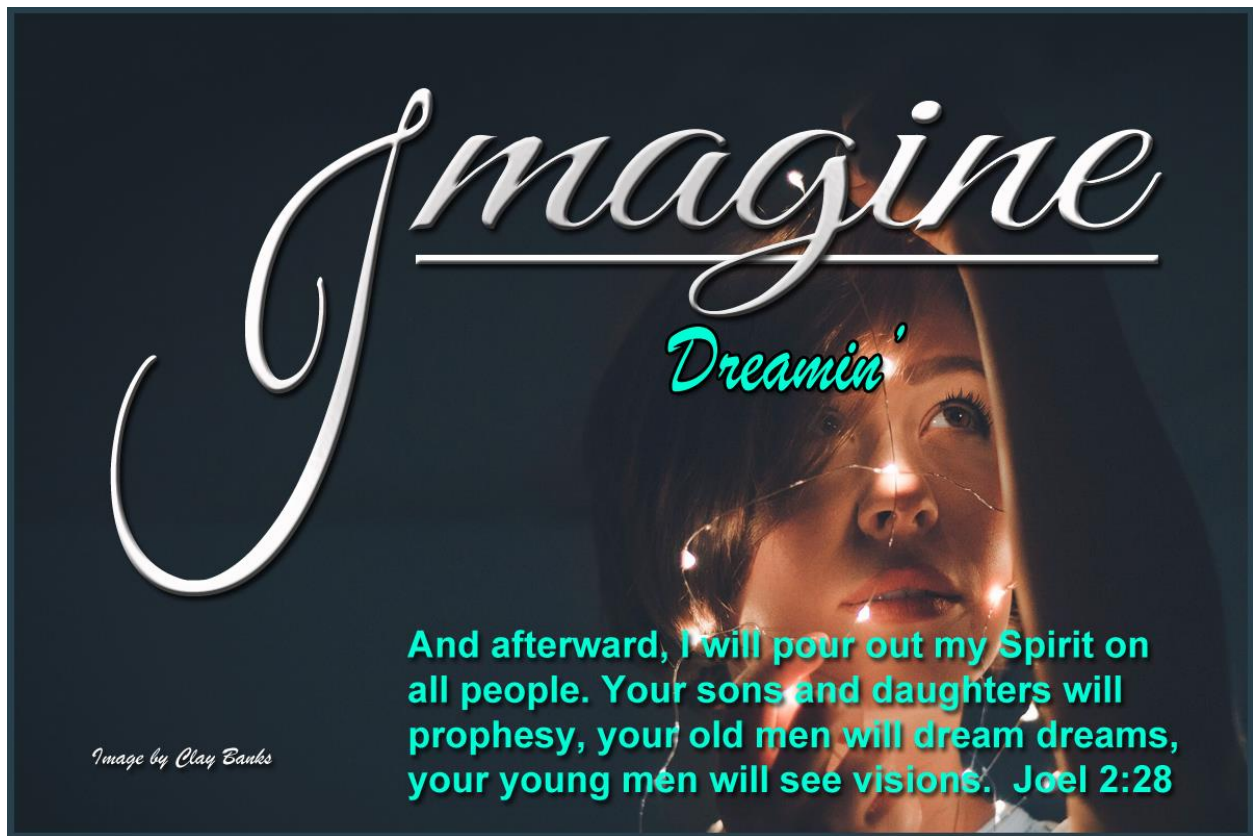


September 12, 2021

DREAMIN'



A Million Dreams

The Greatest Showman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkozLmiLBc0>

Joel 2:28

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

TAKE CARE OF THAT DREAM

John was a scraggly child given to feeble attempts at the impossible. When he was eight, his grandfather sat him down in a chair and then sat down across from him. The wrinkles and channels in his face suggested a hard life, but he had a contagious grin that always made John feel welcomed and loved.

John felt his grandfather searching for something in John's eyes. A twinkle, maybe. Surely, he would find it there. John always felt a certain kind of twinkly when he spent time with his grandfather. He called him Gramps, and his grandfather seemed enamored by the title.

Gramps still had a full head of hair, silver as it was, neatly combed back. John's grandmother had passed away just a couple of years before. Now, Gramps lived by himself in a small apartment that suited his needs. His skin was rough and tired-looking, but his green eyes still had a sparkle. When he spoke, it was with hoarseness brought on my years of smoking cigars, a habit he had given up when his wife got sick.

Gramps reached over the tousled John's hair, which always seemed to be going in the wrong direction. "John," Gramps said, "You can be anything you want to be. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. When you figure out what you love most, climb on that rocket and never let go. Promise me, boy. Don't waste your life chasing things you don't care about."

"I promise, Gramps," John replied, trying hard to show that he could be just as serious as his Grampa when he wanted to be.

“Do you know what you want to be, John? What excites you?” asked Gramps

“I want to fly, Gramps. I want to fly and maybe someday be an astronaut,” John replied definitively. You could tell he had already been thinking about this.

“Good for you, boy! Take care of that dream and cherish it.”

John never forgot that conversation with Gramps. It had occurred in September, just a few days after his eighth birthday. On December 12 of that same year, John’s family received word that Gramps had passed on. “Heart attack,” they said. John grieved. His grandpa had been his best friend. He could tell him anything. He tried to be stoic at the funeral but ended up crying anyway. His father was not happy about that.

A few days later, a box arrived in the mail for John. The note inside said that it was a gift for Christmas. It was from Gramps. Gramps typically spent the holidays with the family, but he must have known that he wouldn’t make it this year. John’s parents told him to put the box under the tree and wait until Christmas to open it. John did as he was told, but the suspense was so overwhelming for him. Still, he waited. But it was the first box he opened on Christmas morning. Inside was a steel necklace with a medallion that read, “Take care of that dream, John. Cherish it.” On the reverse side was, “I’ll be watching. Love Gramps.” He immediately put it around his neck and never took it off, even to bathe. He heard his father grumbling, “Foolish old man.”

John had many people tell him that he would never be what he wanted to be. Even his parents told him that he was foolish for chasing a dream that he could never attain and that he shouldn't be wasting his time. He wasn't smart enough. He wasn't tall enough. He wasn't good enough. Whenever he heard words like that, he took out the medallion and read the words again, "Take care of that dream, John. Cherish it." And he would hear his grandfather's voice, "Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. When you figure out what you love most, climb on that rocket and never let go!"

Today, he sat on the tarmac in his F-18, waiting for clearance for the flight to Houston. He read the letter again. "Congratulations, Lt. John Franklin. Your application for astronaut training has been approved. Please report to NASA Space Headquarters, Houston, on December 12, 2021, by 0900 hours."

John took out his medallion. Years of handling it had left the writing almost illegible, but he knew the words by heart. "Take care of that dream, John. Cherish it."

He tucked the medallion back into his jumpsuit and put the letter in his pocket as the tower gave him final clearance. "Thanks, Gramps," he said, "I will."

Writing computer code for a living can be highly challenging, no matter how well versed you are in writing code. When things work as expected, it is almost anti-climactic. When things don't work as expected, it can bring out the worst in one's behavior—indulging in binge eating, coffee by the potful, restless sleep, fingernail chewing, aggravation in your relationships, just to name a few. There is a psychological reason behind that. When we struggle with an issue that we can't seem to solve, our brain continues to work on it throughout our workday and into the night, no matter what else we are doing. It's constantly taking up valuable processing space in our brain through our subconscious even though we don't realize it. That leaves less brain processing power for everything else.

I know that most of you don't write code or have a programming background, but you do, on occasion, face dilemmas that, on the surface, seem unsolvable. For this discussion, you can think about it this way. There were times when I would go weeks trying to solve a problem with absolutely no indication that I was making any progress. Then some night, when I was beyond exhausted, I would go to bed and indulge in restless sleep. Sometime during the middle of the night, I would wake up in bed, and the answer to my coding, life, or work dilemma would be right there in front of me. I always keep a pen and paper near the bed for these moments. It was as if a light bulb had gone off in my head and shined directly on the answer I was looking for. I would write down my thoughts, even though I was still half asleep. Then, in the morning, I would read those thoughts and pay attention to what my subconscious was trying to tell me. Most of the time, it made sense. Most of the time, the answer worked.

By going to sleep and giving my subconscious room to work, I allowed my brain to allocate enough resources to the problem in order to solve it. Sometimes that answer forced me to throw away my preconceptions and much of my previous work, sending me down a new path. Through this process, I found validity in my dreams.

Not all my dreams were solutions to problems. Most dreams were just cleaning the cobwebs out of my attic; getting rid of garbage. But that is necessary, too. And as much as it might be alien to some of you or sound just outright crazy, I suggest to you that those periods of dreaming provide God a way to speak into you, even when you don't believe it. God has answers to all your questions, and this is just one way God can reach you.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

There are unanswered questions regarding when the prophet Joel lived, but he is the second of the minor prophets found in the Old Testament. That does not help us much when we try to put him on a timeline because the list of minor prophets does not appear chronologically. There is no mention of a King of Judah or any reference to any prophet or leader that can help us pinpoint at least an approximate date.

Still, the book of Joel is only three chapters long, one of the shortest books in the Bible. And Joel does talk about a specific event in Judah, even though we cannot squeeze it into a timeline.

When Joel starts writing, there has been a plague of locusts that has destroyed Judah's crops. The people were on the verge of famine. The prophet describes the event this way:

2Hear this, you elders;

listen, all who live in the land.

**Has anything like this ever happened in your days
or in the days of your ancestors?**

3Tell it to your children,

**and let your children tell it to their children,
and their children to the next generation.**

4What the locust swarm has left

the great locusts have eaten;

what the great locusts have left

the young locusts have eaten;

what the young locusts have left

other locusts have eaten.

Joel 1:2-4

So, not only did a swarm of locusts come through and eat everything, another swarm of young locusts came after them and ate what was left. And just to be sure that there was nothing left, other locusts came in behind the young

locusts and gleaned anything that the first two swarms missed. This event was a tragedy of the greatest proportions.

Joel comes before the people of Judah and prophesizes: if the people will beg forgiveness and turn from their evil ways, then God will forgive them and provide them with a crop that is double the size of the one they lost. And just so we put today's scripture in context, let me read to you Joel 2:25-28

25“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—

**the great locust and the young locust,
the other locusts and the locust swarm—
my great army that I sent among you.**

**26You will have plenty to eat, until you are full,
and you will praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has worked wonders for you;
never again will my people be shamed.**

**27Then you will know that I am in Israel,
that I am the LORD your God,
and that there is no other;
never again will my people be shamed.**

**28 And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.**

So, not only do they get to eat their fill as a reward for their “new attitude,” but they also get the gift of the Spirit poured out on them, which will articulate itself through prophesy, dreams, and visions. When we walk on the path that God has chosen for us, we are blessed with God’s Spirit. We receive those same gifts as well. We can see the prophecy of God’s plan before us. We can receive and understand the dreams that God sends us. We will also have clarity of vision as we face the world and all its troubles.

Acts 2 talks about that moment at Pentecost right after Peter preaches. Peter begins talking about that moment when everyone, speaking in all different languages, starts proclaiming God’s Word in their own tongue. People around them thought that they must be drunk.

Listen to these verses from Acts 2:14-18

14Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15**These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! **16**No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17“In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

18Even on my servants, both men and women,

**I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.**

Why do you think Peter used this verse from Joel at Pentecost? Some theologians believe that Peter used it in error. That is was all a mistake. But when I read anything about Peter, I never him doing or saying unintentional things. Peter is a straightforward, in-your-face kind of guy. Although there were times that Jesus had to correct him, he was always willing to admit his mistakes and correct them. He makes no such attempt when using this verse from Joel at Pentecost. I have to believe that he said just what he meant to say, that the Spirit was speaking through him, telling him that this was what the public needed to hear.

When we hear:

**I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.**

Do we want to cringe and turn away? Separate ourselves from it because we think we might look foolish or drunk?

Or are we willing to open our minds and let the verse speak into us? Are we willing to accept that fact that the Holy Spirit can and does communicate with

us through our subconscious and our dreams? Are we willing to let God give us vision, show us prophesy, or even wake us up in the middle of the night with answers to our questions and solutions to our problems?

God never leaves us. God's Spirit constantly guides us. Our belief in Christ as our savior, our redeemer, our counselor is core to our faith. He will never leave or forsake us.

I want you to give yourselves some grace this week and be open to what God is trying to tell you. Be open to how God interprets the world around you, reducing it down to its parts. God wants you to see those parts. When God shows you those parts, ask how God wants you to respond to those parts. It can take a lot of stress out of our lives. It can bring clarity when our eyes see only fog.

Just like John in our story, today, let us be open to the dreams that God plants in us, give them air to breathe, focus on them and watch God work.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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