

## ***"Following A Dream"***

***Deuteronomy 13:1-5***  
***June 6, 2010***

***Acts 10:9-16***  
***St. James UCC***

***Preached by Rev. Robert Matlack***

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It is a real pleasure this morning to recognize our graduates. Each of you has reached a special milestone in your life. We are honored today to recognize your achievement, and while none of us knows exactly what that future will hold, we look ahead to the future with you, hoping and praying that it will be a bright future indeed. It is that sense of envisioning, of dreaming about the future that I would like to talk about with you this morning.

We all have hopes and dreams for the future. It is natural, and indeed important that we do so. We ought to be looking to the future with hope and anticipation, recognizing that it is a gift from God, a gift which holds many challenges and many opportunities.

Our text from Deuteronomy reminds us that if we listen to interpreters of dreams or those who promise miracles and wonders that lead us away from God, when we are tempted to place other priorities at the center of our life, then we are being tested, and when we give in to those temptations and turn away from God, we are being deceived.

Now we can sit here this morning and say, "not me". That may happen to someone else, but it won't happen to me. I hope and pray that we are right, that none of us gathered here today will give in to that temptation, that false hope, but I know that whether or not we succumb to that temptation, each of us will indeed be tempted.

We live in a world that is rapidly changing. One newsletter for executives, a paper which is designed to stimulate new ideas and to generate action on their part, says that "our times are revolutionary. Change occurs faster than our normal ability to cope and react. The fast adapters will be the winners and leaders of the new order of things." It then goes on to list a number of things that it views as critically important for executives, and the first one on their list is "we must learn to love the new technology... Second, we must have renewed determination and thirst for our personal, continuous acquisition of new knowledge... Third, we must reject our past habits and reasoning methods and adapt new techniques for faster analysis and decision-making."

I mention this because it says a great deal about this world in which we live. We live in a world that is very fast-paced, and is changing rapidly. We live in a world that demands that if we are to be successful in our chosen career, whatever that career may be, we must be willing to learn, to adapt, to change, to grow. Now learning and growing are certainly not bad things. They can be very exciting indeed! They are something that we all need to be doing! Yet, the concern that I would lift up is that in the midst of our need to change and

grow, as we seek to keep pace with the needs of the world and our brothers and sisters in all corners of it, in the midst of that desire to grow, there will be temptation. We will be tempted to worship the scientific marvels and achievements that surround us. The technology of today is wonderful, and the technology of tomorrow, of next year and the year after will be even more breath-taking. We will see challenges and opportunities that we have hardly dreamed of. Doors will be opened and opportunities created that we did not imagine today. The technology is changing. Jobs are changing. People are changing, but in the midst of all of those changes, some things stay the same.

God loves us and always will. That will never change! Whatever might happen in our lives and in the world around us, we know that God loves us. In fact, it is God who has created us and gives us the gift of life. Without God we would not be. Without God we would not have any of the opportunities and challenges that we face. Without God there would be no life, no growth, no being.

I remind you of that because in the midst of the challenges and the temptations that we face, our text from Deuteronomy reminds us that we must love God with all of our heart, that our most important task is to “Follow the Lord and honor him”.

Back almost two thousand years ago, as the church was just getting started, it too faced a time of great turmoil, a time that demanded change if the church was to be faithful. You see, the earliest followers of Jesus were almost all Jews, so that after Christ’s death and resurrection, when the church really got started, they started as an offshoot of Judaism, requiring that the members of the church follow all of the Jewish laws and practices, as well as accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

This worked well as long as the church was centered in Jerusalem, as long as the vast majority of the members of the church were Jewish, they could and did expect that they live as Jews as well as living as Christians. When Paul began expanding the boundaries of the church, by starting new communities of faith in all sorts of cities outside of the boundaries of Israel, then a tension arose within the church. Some like Paul argued that the church should be open to Gentiles, to non-Jews, without requiring them to adopt all of the practices of Judaism. Others, such as James, argued that they should not change. The requirements should continue as they had been. Others, such as Peter wavered, seeing merit in both positions.

In our text from Acts we hear an account of a vision that Peter had, a vision which changed the way that he thought about the issue, a vision which moved him to advocate that the church be opened to Gentiles, and which caused him to recognize that God loves all people, and that our task is to preach and teach the gospel to the very ends of the earth. This vision changed Peter’s understanding of the issue, and through that vision, Peter was able to change the church, to lead them in a new direction, a direction which opened the church to many new people, a direction which allowed the church to be the bearer of God’s love and God’s grace in the lives of many who until then had known neither.

You see, our dreams have the potential to lead us into God’s future, to guide us in the

direction that God wants us to go, to help us to be faithful, loving people of God. Our dreams also have the potential to lead us away from God, to be a source of temptation which leads us to decide that we do not need God, that we can worship technology or money or power or possessions. The temptation is there. Our dreams have the potential to lead us in either direction. Our dreams have the potential to lead us to be the person that God created us to be, with all of the fullness and fulfillment that that means, and our dreams have the potential to destroy us, to lead us in a path of spiritual death. The choice is ours, and the question remains, which dream will we follow? Will we follow the one which leads us to be faithful and to follow God - or the one which leads us away from God? Which dream will you follow today and tomorrow?

The choice is there and the challenge is ours. We have been given many wonderful gifts by God, and each of us, whether we graduated this week, last month, or fifty years ago, each of us faces the same challenge. Which dream will we follow today? Will we be faithful today or not? How will we live? Who will we follow?

As we struggle with those questions, there are two stories that I would like to share with you. The first is about a fourth grade boy who went to a beach with his father to swim. Once he was in the water, he became separated from his father by the crowd. The beach was near a place where a river entered the sea, and the boy drifted out along in the current of the river until he floated out into the open sea. Fortunately, he was wearing a life jacket. A passenger boat, passing the distance, saw a small red dot on the horizon, went to investigate and rescued the boy. When asked how he could endure hours alone out in the open sea, the boy said that he had been sure that his father would come to his rescue at any cost.

The second story is about a disciple who came riding on his camel to the tent of his Sufi Master. He dismounted and walked right into the tent, bowed low and said, "So great is my trust in God that I have left my camel outside untied, convinced that God protects the interests of those who love him." "Go tie your camel, you fool!" Said the Master. "God cannot be bothered doing for you what you are perfectly capable of doing for yourself."

As we go forth today, let us go and follow our dreams, for they hold great promise and potential for us. Let us follow our dreams with the faith of the fourth grader, who knew that his father would come to his rescue at any cost, for we too must know that God's love is so great, that God always wants and seeks what is best for us. Let us also follow our dreams with the reminder of the Sufi master who said, "God cannot be bothered doing for you what you are perfectly capable of doing for yourself." For God has given each of us great and important work to do in this world in which we live.

In that spirit of faith and commitment, let us go forth to love and serve God in the dreams that we follow - today, tomorrow, and all the days to come.

Amen.