

BACCALAUREATE SUNDAY
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FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
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I Timothy 4:11-14; Romans 5:1-5; John 14:25-27a
April 10, 2015



Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dreams

Once upon a mountain top, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up. The first little tree looked up at the stars and said: "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!" The second tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. "I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world!" The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in a busy town and said. "I don't want to leave the mountain at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me they'll raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I'll be the tallest tree in the world!"

Three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up. Maybe you remember what you used to tell people as a child, when they asked what you wanted to be when you grew up. Personally, even though I have the grace of a dog on roller skates, I always dreamed of being a ballerina. As children we are encouraged to dream, because as they say, "if you can dream it you can be it."

Now I'm not sure what you all are feeling as you think about life after graduation, but if you're like the average student, it's equal parts excitement for what's to come, fear of the unknown, and relief that you've made it this far.

But I do hope, like these trees, that you aren't afraid to dream, and even to dream big, because each of you is uniquely gifted to serve our world,

and as you go out in the world to figure out what your dreams are or to make them a reality, there truly is not one step of your journey that you walk alone because God's Spirit and our prayers go with you.

Disappointments

Years passed. The rain came, the sun shone and the little trees grew tall. One day three wood cutters climbed the mountain. One wood cutter looked at the first tree and said, "This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining ax, the first tree fell. "Now I shall be made into a beautiful chest, I shall hold wonderful treasure!" the first tree said.

The second wood cutter looked at the next tree and said, "This tree is strong. It's perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining ax, the second tree fell. "Now I shall sail mighty waters!" thought the second tree. "I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!"

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last wood cutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven. But the wood cutter never even looked up. "Any kind of tree will do for me." He muttered. With a swoop of his shining ax, the third tree fell.

*The first tree **rejoiced** when the wood cutter brought her to a carpenter's shop...until the carpenter fashioned the tree into a **feed box** for beasts of the field. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, or filled with treasure. She was coated with saw dust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.*

*The second tree **smiled** when the wood cutter took him to a shipyard... but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead the once strong tree was hammered and sawn into a simple fishing boat. He was too small and too weak to sail on an ocean, or even a river, instead he was taken to a little lake.*

*The third tree was **confused** when the wood cutter cut her into strong beams...then left her in a lumberyard. "What happened?" The once tall tree wondered. "All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God..."*

Dreams are **great** – they make us feel good to think about wonderful possibilities...

But...dreams can **also** distract us from the important **ordinary** things of life.

Dreams are **great** – they can inspire us to go **beyond** the boundaries of our lives...

But...dreams can **also** make us feel...**disappointed** with what we have.

Dreams are **great** – they can push us to **create** opportunities to **advance**...

But...dreams can **also** lead us **away** from those things that keep us **grounded**:

- our faith in God;
- the love of our family;
- a healthy sense of service to others.

And yet, through it all – dreams realized or disappointments accepted, God promises to be with us every step of the way – and more than that – promises to use us for the sake of the Gospel.

Delights

Many days passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman

placed her newborn baby in the feed box. "I wish I could make a cradle for him," her husband whispered. The new mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. "This manger is beautiful." She said. And suddenly the first tree knew she was holding the greatest treasure in the world...

Years later, a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree quietly sailed out into the lake. Soon a thundering and thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered. He knew that he did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through the wind and the rain. The tired man awoke. He stood up, stretched out his hand, and said, "Peace." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew that he was carrying the king of heaven and earth.

One Friday morning a short time later, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten wood pile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry, jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to her. She felt ugly and harsh and cruel. But that Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything. It made the third tree feel strong. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was infinitely better than being the tallest tree in the world.

The disappointed trees nearly forgot their dreams.

- They wondered what God was doing and why He hadn't helped them realize their dreams.
- It was especially perplexing because one of the trees wanted to glorify God by being the tallest tree in the forest. You'd think God would be on board with that plan.

But then God surprised them, and you'll find that this happens often in your life.

The three trees wanted to be important and to make a difference, and they thought they knew exactly what that looked like, but what God had in mind was even better than their wildest dreams.

As it turns out, "if you can dream it you can be it," is a pretty limited equation, because it doesn't leave much space for the surprises of the Spirit.

Our second lesson puts this really well. It says: "We're never left feeling short-changed. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit." Graduates, you likely won't end up where you expect. What you dream today may not be the dream that is realized, but you truly won't be able to round up enough containers for all the good God will pour into your life.

So... In good times and bad, whatever the day,
God's with you my friends, wherever you stay.
Just focus on Jesus wherever you go,
The right path will arise – may it ever be so.

You'll meander through mazes, mysteries, hallways,
But with twists, turns, and speed bumps, remember this always:
You are God's great disciples, beloved and believing –
His power and hope you are always receiving!

So, disciples of Jesus, today is your day,
The world's out there waiting to hear what you say.
You'll enjoy finding God in some very strange places,
Just open your eyes, God's right there in your faces.

May the Lord bless and protect you,
And ever keep you safe.
So dream your great dreams...
And make the world a better place!

Amen.

References:

Three Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt

Oh, The Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss

A Baccalaureate Sermon by Myra Carroll-Pezzella