

“Community of Dreams”
Psalm 113/Luke 14:12-14/Acts 2:37-47
FPC/Stewardship Sunday/11/15/09
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I. Introduction

“If you build it, he will come.” The famous line was first spoken in the movie “Field of Dreams.” In this 1989 movie Kevin Costner stars as an Iowa corn farmer who hears a mysterious voice in his cornfield: “If you build it, he will come.” The movie is about dreams, fulfilling dreams, and overcoming regrets about past life choices.

In the movie Costner lives in rural Iowa with his wife and daughter. He lives under the heavy burden of regret over a broken relationship with his father, which was never healed before his father passed away. Costner is grieved over his foolish assessment of his father as “worn down by life,” and remembers his father’s love of baseball, the Chicago White Sox, and the star of that team, Shoeless Joe Jackson, who was banned from baseball for “throwing” the 1919 World Series. There are a lot of regrets there.

While walking through his cornfield Costner hears a voice, “If you build it, he will come.” He then imagines a crazy thing; a baseball field in the middle of his corn. Following his vision, Costner plows his corn under, and builds a baseball field. The neighbors stop by to shake their heads at the craziness, and heckle him. They have no vision or faith in anything more or bigger than the lives they know and the corn they see.

Time goes by. The beautiful baseball field with cornfields all around lies dormant.....empty.....vacant. Sometimes faith is tested. Costner doubts the voice and the vision. Then one summer evening it happens; some of the long deceased 1919 Chicago White Sox appear on the field, including Shoeless Joe Jackson. Once banished from baseball, they now play the game they love on this special field. In one brief dialogue Shoeless Joe Jackson confesses to Costner:

Jackson: Man, I did love this game. I’d have played for food money. It was the game.....The sounds, the smells. Did you ever hold a ball or a glove to your face?

Costner: Yeah.

Jackson: I use to love traveling on the trains from town to town. The hotels.....the brass spittoons in the lobbies, brass beds in the rooms. It was the crowd, rising to their feet when the ball was hit deep. Shoot, I’d play for nothing.

On that crazy baseball field in the middle of Iowa corn, dreams are fulfilled. Regrets are overcome. But the story is just getting started.

II. Exegesis

The stories and dreams of God's people are just as crazy as a baseball field in the middle of Iowa corn. They are the stories and dreams of the majesty and mercy of God.....the holy God, creator of all and above all, who reaches down to raise up the lowly.....to make a way when there is no way.....to give life to the barren.....to give dreams to the hopeless.....to give second chances to those buried by regrets.

A voice and vision comes to a particular couple; it speaks descendents, land and the blessing of God for all creation. It's a ball field in the middle of corn....but Abraham and Sarah believe. The mercy of the majestic God acts.....the miracle of a son named Isaac, the promise of land, and the blessing begins. The mercy continues, and the story is told, from one generation to the next.

Slaves are then freed from slavery in Egypt. A sea is blown back for escape. Food and water are supplied in the wilderness. God's law is given at a place called Sinai. These people of God are then given land.....good land with vineyards, deep wells, and rich pastures. Slaves and wanderers have become a nation.....and in their life together they are to bear witness to the majesty and mercy of God.

Years pass.....generations come and go. The stories and promises to God are forgotten. They become like the nations and culture around them. Foreigners look at them and see a people no different than themselves. In time the land is ripped from their hands. This people go to a distant land, Babylon, as captives. Their numbers are few. Any blessing for creation seems hidden.

But the majestic God is full of mercy. This people of God return to the land. They tell the stories again.....stories of God's mercy in the past.....stories of life where there was barrenness.....stories of salvation where there was slavery and death....stories of regret, mercy and second chances. And with the stories come hope.....hope in the God who cares for the lowly.....hope in a vision they dare to cling to and believe. It's the baseball field in the middle of Iowa corn.

This is the song of Psalm 113. It is a hymn of praise. It begins with an invitation to praise this God.....Hallelujah. God is not present in idols, but is present when the stories are shared, and the name is spoken...present when people worship. Hallelujah. And this God is more than creation.....more than nature's powers.....more than the mystery of the heavens.....more than the expanse of the universe. God is majestic, and due worship. But there is more. This God above all is merciful to God's creation. God acts in this world.....and there's the scandal of the particular; God acts in

particular lives of people. The lowly are lifted up....the barren given life. Tell the stories...dream the dreams...believe the vision. There is more going on than the corn field all around us.

The hymn and hope for the lowly in Psalm 113 will be sung by some of the prophets; Isaiah (i.e. The Call to Worship, Is. 57:15), Micah (i.e. 4:1-4, and Jeremiah (i.e. 23:1-8). Mary, the mother of Jesus, will sing her own verse of this hymn for the lowly in the Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord.....for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of this servant.....His mercy is for those who fear him....He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things." (Luke 1:46-55) Do you hear the echoes of Psalm 113? It's a song about the majesty of God, and the mercy of God for the lowly.

Jesus hears the voice.....he believes in the vision.....he trusts the song....so he will gather the lowly around him.....and they will play baseball in the middle of the corn all around them. The powerful have no vision, hear no voice, and will heckle Jesus.....but the dreamers come, and those with regrets are given second chances. In our text from Luke 14 (Luke 14:12-14) we find Jesus teaching at a dinner table. Table fellowship was one of the most segregated times in Jewish life; rich from poor, powerful from powerless, Jews from gentiles, self-assured from humble. But Jesus "turns all the everyday practices on their heads." "Don't invite the rich, your relatives or the powerful to your dinners. Instead, invite the poor, crippled and blind. Invite the lowly.....the forgotten.....the humble. Do it out of love.....do it out of God's mercy. Where and when that happens, it's the kingdom of God." It's the baseball field in the middle of Iowa corn.....isn't it?

But there's more. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's Holy Spirit falls upon Jesus' followers. They're given power and courage. When Peter stands and preaches what it all means, this is what happens;

Read Acts 2:37-47.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit means it is the end of the old age.....it's the beginning of the new age.....the beginning of God's kingdom....the great hope of the ages, already started, but not yet complete. This text in Acts describes the life of the new age people.... the community of God's people; leaving the old ways, baptized into the new life, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They are different than the world around them; learning about the ways of Jesus from the apostles, welcoming the poor and lowly to their tables, and sharing in prayer. Miracles are happening, and one of those miracles is the generosity that is part of their life together. This is a joyful, generous community; caring, sharing, meeting

needs. And people are watching, believing and joining. More people see the baseball field in the middle of the corn, and they come to play.....they believe and become part of this community of dreams.

III. Application

This is the real context for Christian stewardship. Generous, joyful stewardship is more than charitable donations. Rather it is part of a radical, new way of life; the new age, the kingdom of God, the community of God's people. Generous giving makes each of us a part of this community. We turn from old ways, are changed by the Holy Spirit, and bear witness to a different way of life. Generous, joyful giving is part of that new way of life. Together we give and support missions in our church, in our community, and in Sudan and Egypt. Together we give so to have worship filled with music, prayer, scripture and sermon. Together we give and the stories of Christian faith are taught to our children. Together we give to care for our building, a facility that speaks of hope and beauty to our community in need. Together we give.....and miracles still happen.....and some of those miracles happen with Pledge Cards and offering envelopes. In generous, joyful giving we bear witness to a new age; the kingdom of God.

At the end of the movie, "Field of Dreams," there is one dream yet to be fulfilled, one regret yet to be overcome. It's the relationship of Kevin Costner's character with his dad. In a powerful scene, Shoeless Joe Jackson repeats the mysterious words of the voice, "If you build it, 'he' will come," and points to a catcher taking off his equipment. Costner recognizes the catcher as his dad, but as a much younger man. His dad asks him, "Is this heaven?" Costner responds, "It's Iowa." "Iowa," his dad repeats. "I could have sworn this is heaven." "Is there a heaven?" Costner asks. "Oh yeah," his dad says. "It's a place where dreams come true." Costner looks around and sees his wife playing with his daughter, and says, "Maybe this is heaven."

Father and son then play catch. A great dream is fulfilled. A regret is overcome. Maybe it is heaven.....or at least big handfuls of what life will be.

And as the movie closes there is a long line of cars coming to field.....folks who can see the field.....believe in the field....and want to share in the field. It's a place where dreams are fulfilled, and regrets can be overcome. It's a place for the lowly and humble. It's a place of joy and generosity. It's a place of God's majesty and mercy. It's a new way of life.....the kingdom of God.....the new age....big handfuls of what life will be. It's the community of dreams.....the church of Jesus Christ.....of which in generosity and joy we can share.