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**Big Dreams:**

“YOU GOTTA HAVE HEART”

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Scripture Medley: Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Jeremiah 31:33;
Matthew 5:8; Ephesians 3:17; Mark 12:30-31

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Dt. 6:4-5)

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:33)

Blessed are the poor in heart, for they will see God. (Mt. 5:8)

That Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (Eph. 3:17)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as your self. (Mk. 12:30-31)

The single word *heart* is perhaps the most important anthropological word in the Bible. The word appears 814 times in the scriptures. It refers to the physical heart, but more importantly to the center of emotions, feelings, moods, passion, the intellect and moral self. It is the point of our contact with God. It is the center of our personality, of our being. As you can tell from the scriptures, the heart is connected to our relationship with God, our moral being and the place where Christ is invited to dwell. The heart is where covenant is loved out. It is the metaphor for our whole self.

Further examples of the Bible’s take on heart: “Only fear the Lord, and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you.” (1 Sam. 12:24) It is the place where conversion takes place: “Give me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” (Ps. 51:10) “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning; rend your hearts not your clothing.” (Joel 2:12) The heart’s function is the source of thought and reflection. The heart understands, provides wisdom to rule justly and wisely, and discerns good and evil.

Today we begin a three-week series of sermons in both traditional worship and Shine around the idea of Big Dreams and Open Hearts, Open Minds and Open Doors. With big dreams come God-sized projects. This church has a long history of dreaming big and then having the heart to follow through. I am reminded of the famous song “The Impossible Dream” from the Broadway show, *Man of La Mancha*. This song captures for me what it means to dream big. Listen to the lyrics:
To dream ... the impossible dream ...
To fight ... the unbeatable foe ...
To bear ... with unbearable sorrow ...
To run ... where the brave dare not go ...
To right ... the unrightable wrong ...
To love ... pure and chaste from afar ...
To try ... when your arms are too weary ...
To reach ... the unreachable star ...

This is my quest, to follow that star ...
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far ...
To fight for the right, without question or pause ...
To be willing to march into Hell, for a Heavenly cause ...

And I know if I’ll only be true to this glorious quest,
That my heart will lie will lie peaceful and calm,
when I’m laid to my rest ...
And the world will be better for this:
That one man, scorned and covered with scars,
Still strove, with his last ounce of courage,
To reach ... the unreachable star ...

What are God’s big dreams? “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Is.2:4) What then does it mean to have an open heart for God’s big dream? “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic.6:8)

The great “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. is truly a God-sized dream of racial reconciliation and harmony. When we were in South Africa, we learned of Nelson Mandela’s big dream of reconciliation through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by Methodist Bishop Peter Storey and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Further examples of big dreamers close to this congregation are our missionaries in Zambia, John and Kendra Enright, where at Kafakumba they dream of training a generation of Methodist pastors, providing sustainable jobs, and offering a refuge for youth from the temptations of the society. Others include Will and Ella Faircloth, our missionaries in Costa Rica, and the Methodist dreams coming alive at Jeremie, Haiti.

This church has dreamed big with the move from downtown way out onto Maple, and more recently the building of the CLC and The Penny Project where, under the leadership of our students, over 23 million pennies were raised to fight AIDS in Africa—23 million representing the number of people in Africa infected with the HIV virus. What is the next big dream? Reclaiming and reinvigorating a blighted Detroit neighborhood in conjunction with eighty churches?

In all these cases, to see the dreams fulfilled “You Gotta Have Heart,” as the song from the Broadway play Damn Yankees proclaims:
You’ve gotta have heart
All you really need is heart
When the odds are sayin’ you’ll never win
That’s when the grin should start
You’ve gotta have hope
Mustn’t sit around and mope
Nothin’s half as bad as it may appear
Wait’ll next year and hope
When your luck is battin’ zero
Get your chin up off the floor
Mister, you can be a hero

You can open any door, there’s nothin’ to it but to do it
You’ve gotta have heart
Miles ‘n miles ‘n miles of heart
Oh, it’s fine to be a genius of course
But keep that old horse
Before the cart
First you’ve gotta have heart

What then does it mean to “have heart”? An open heart? The song comes from the impossible dream of the Washington Senators of upending the New York Yankees. The play was written during an era when the Yankees were seemingly invincible, constantly in the World Series, and the Senators were perennially last in the American League.

Let me share with you three recent examples where I have been shown what an open heart is like. At dinner the last night of our recent adventure to Tunisia, each of our nine-strong, three-generation family members was asked to name their favorite experience, sight or food. Mine included this story of radical hospitality, a tale of someone with heart who taught me faithful presence. It was the next to last day of our two-week excursion in Tunisia, a day which will live in travel infamy.

To set the stage, we had spent the previous four days in the Sahara, with temperatures over 100, and had travelled up into the mountains (think Arizona) on winding roads, where in the town of Le Kef we spent the night in an un-air-conditioned hotel. The next morning we were off to Dougga, the best preserved Roman city in North Africa, which sits high on a hillside overlooking a picturesque valley. By the time we arrived, the heat was oppressive. It was around noon, and the walk was all uphill. Nanci and I elected to sit under the shade of an olive tree while the intrepid tourists in the family set out to explore the ruins. We sat in the shade admiring the vista, taking pictures while consuming litres of water.

Two hours later we left for Testour, our luncheon stop en route to Tunis, again via winding mountain roads. In the meantime I was getting queasier and queasier by the moment until, in the town of Testour, I signaled our driver to stop, and I opened the front door and became ill from heat exhaustion on a curb in front of a shop. It was at that moment that I learned true Tunisian radical hospitality when I looked up and saw before me the shop owner at the car door with a wet
towel to wipe my face. He invited me into his home behind his shop to lie down and wash up. Here was a person who did not share my complexion, my language, my ethnicity or my religion, yet because he opened his heart, mine was likewise opened. We could see each other as human beings, not as labels. Having an open heart is to expect the unexpected! Testour was truly a test!

Proof that you can dream the impossible dream occurred at the Olympics last week when we saw Oscar Pistorious of South Africa, a double amputee, run in the 400-meter race and qualify for the semifinals. His dream to run as a double amputee was clearly an *Impossible Dream*—except to himself and his family. The poignant moment came, however, at the end of his last race when Kirani James, who was ultimately the Gold Medal winner from Grenada, exchanged nametags and hugs with him, and then the Grenadian tweeted that we need to see Oscar just as an Olympic runner! Truly a moment proving *you gotta have heart* to succeed while demonstrating to the world a faithful presence to one another, and care and compassion for the other.

Many people have been faithful presences to me, one of whom is a fellow Yale roommate, a graduate civil engineer who spent his entire career working on Space Shuttle engines for Rockwell. Many years ago while on a retirement cruise in the Baltic, his wife suffered a massive stroke requiring her being airlifted back to Los Angeles and then years of physical therapy. Several years later Nanci and I were having dinner with them at a nice restaurant in Chicago. I knew both when they were dating back at Yale. In the course of an evening of reminiscences, I observed him transfer his wife into and out of her wheelchair, help her eat, interpret her speech, and even escort her in and out of the ladies’ room. She was well groomed and dressed that night with the same style and flair she was known for before her stroke. This was all done without pretense or self consciousness, but with dignity and grace out of love and compassion—in a word, from the heart. May we all be such a faithful presence to each other and our loved ones. Expect the unexpected. Little did this engineer know he was being a “faithful presence” to me, not just his wife. He taught me what it means to have an open heart with his infectious compassion.

What’s your big dream? How can you be a faithful presence? How will you respond to the unexpected? Remember, “you gotta have heart, mile and miles of heart” to be open to God’s dream for you and for humanity. As the AT&T commercial says, *Rethink Possible!*