

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
19th October 2021**

READINGS

“And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old will dream dreams,
your young will see visions. Even on my servants,
both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Joel 2:28-29

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Mark 11:12-14, 20-26

REFLECTION

Hans Babblinger lived in Ulm in Germany. Hans' great passion was flying. He loved the thought of flying, he loved to watch the birds and dream what it would be like to soar among them. There was a problem though – Hans lived in 16th century Germany. There were no planes, no helicopters, no means to fly! However, Hans never let go of his dream. His great skill was engineering, in fact he made a living out of engineering and helping people to achieve the impossible. At a time when medicine was primitive Hans spent his life designing artificial limbs for amputees.

And he never stopped dreaming. One day he put his engineering skills to the test, sat down at his desk and began to design himself a set of wings. When they were finished, he invited some friends, and they went into the foothills of the Alps to test out Hans design. It was a good choice of location for the hills provided natural thermal updrafts, which meant that when Hans jumped off his mountainside the updrafts lifted him and he soared and then glided gently down to the ground. He had done it – Hans Babblinger had flown. The people cheered and applauded.

Problem is there are always people around to knock us down. There is always someone there to tell you it's impossible, or that people won't like it, or to find some other reason why it won't work or shouldn't be tried. Jesus experienced it all the time. When Jesus acted as the servant they complained, when he healed, they complained because it was a holy day, when he visited the outcasts like Zacchaeus, they complained that he was mixing with the wrong folk, when he preached the love of God, they complained that he was a bad influence. Every time Jesus set people free, the religious leaders tried to tie them down again.

The same thing happened to Hans Babblinger. The news of his feat spread wide and far, and eventually the king announced he was going to Ulm to see this thing for himself. The local bishop persuaded Hans to show off his flying skills, but this time to do so in the town, by the cathedral alongside the river. Hans agreed and on the allotted day, all gathered. But Hans had made a mistake, you see in the town there were no thermals, and when he jumped of the cathedral, there was nothing to lift him up, he plummeted into the river Danube! Hans survived, but the king was very unhappy at the performance, and the bishop was mortified. The next Sunday in the cathedral, the bishop preached a sermon in which he declared that people were never meant to fly. Such a thing was not the will of God. Hans believed him, he put away his wings, and with them his dreams. Grounded at last, Hans died a few months later.

It's so easy to lower our expectations, it's so easy to settle for the status quo, it's so easy to accept excuses as solid reasoning. But that's certainly not God's way. Like Hans Babblinger, God is a dreamer.

After all, who else but a dreamer would put such difference and variety in the world. Of course, all the birds could have been one colour and looked the same – but where is the fun in that. Of course, all the trees could have looked the same and all the leaves been standard issue but where is the challenge in that? Oh yes, God's a dreamer. There is other evidence too - look at the people that God chose. Old shepherds should not take on powerful rulers – tell that to Moses as he stands before pharaoh; teenage shepherds should not take on a giant that everyone else is afraid to fight – tell that to David; and just to keep the shepherd theme – ordinary common shepherds don't get to be at the centre

of the story, they don't get to see angel choirs or meet the son of God! – tell that to the Bethlehem shepherds!

So don't be afraid to look for God's vision for your lives, don't be afraid to dream dreams for the future – this is the fertile ground for hope and action that makes a difference.

Interestingly, that cathedral at Ulm is still around – you can go visit it if you wish. There isn't a congregation there now of course, they are long gone – it's just the tourists who go now and how do they get there? They fly of course!

PRAYER

Lord,
You are the ultimate dreamer,
Fashioning life out of nothing,
Revealing a world in all its colourful beauty,
Challenging people to trust you,
And leading us in worship and in service to all sorts of places we never expected to be,
Such are your dreams for us.
So, Lord,
When we are unsure,
When we are frightened,
When we have no idea what lies ahead,
Free us from our fear
Free us from our negative,
And that old idea that we cannot do it!
And lead us instead to your dream
Enable us to see your vision.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

