



Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Text: Genesis 37:18-28

February 23, 2025

Dreamers & Dream-Deniers

Back in the 1860s, there were 63 chemical elements known in the world. This included metals like copper, lead, silver and gold, and gases like hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen. In 1868, a Russian chemist named Dmitri Mendeleev wrote a classic textbook on chemistry. In it he admitted that no one had yet managed to organize the various elements into a systematic chart. Mendeleev himself had tried but failed. The elements each had unique qualities that lumped some of them together into sub-groups, but no plan had been discovered on how to organize all the known elements. One day Mendeleev wrote down each of the elements onto a card and sat at his desk trying to decide how best to group them into clusters. Unsuccessful and frustrated in his task, he dozed off. While asleep he had a dream about how to arrange the elements according to their properties and their atomic weights. He awoke and quickly organized his 63 cards into an early version of what we now recognize as the periodic table. (I included a copy of his first attempt in today's worship bulletin.) We'll come back to Mendeleev's chart and his dream in a moment.

Dreams are amazing things. They can inspire us, and they help us imagine things that don't yet exist. Yet for both those reasons, they are sometimes considered to be dangerous. For as long as there have been dreamers, there have been those who tried to destroy the dreamers – the dream-deniers. We need to ask ourselves, what are they so afraid of?

According to the book of Genesis, Joseph was a dreamer. He was Jacob's favorite son - the boy doted upon and given the long-sleeved robe of many colors. Joseph dreamt of a time when each of the twelve brothers bound up a sheaf of wheat with Joseph's standing tall while the other sheaves bowed down before it. Another time Joseph dreamt that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed to him. These dreams would later come true as part of God's plan of salvation for Jacob's family, but in that moment, Joseph's brothers hated this dreamer as only rival siblings are capable of.

One day Jacob sent off Joseph to check on his brothers, who were tending the family's flocks in fields miles away. When they saw the boy with his audacious coat coming toward them, their hatred turned homicidal. They said, "Here comes the dreamer. Come, let us kill him and see what becomes of his dreams." The dream-deniers wanted to murder Joseph, but Reuben offered a different option: throw him into a stone cistern where he'd be without food or water. Some dreams die violently. Sometimes they die through neglect, like intentionally refusing to care for those who are in need. And sometimes people profit in the process of killing dreams. Scripture tells us that Joseph's

brothers stripped him of his fine robe, sold him as a slave to Midian traders, pocketed the profit, and then covered Joseph's garment with goat's blood to make Jacob think the boy had been killed by wild beasts. Violence – hardheartedness – profiteering: Joseph's brothers resorted to all three sins to kill this dreamer.

Joseph's brothers were dream-deniers. There are plenty of similar deniers at work in our world today – resorting to violence, turning deaf ears and hardened hearts of indifference to the needs of the poor, and quick to make a profit out of their abuses of power. But I return to my earlier question: What are they so afraid of? To answer that question, we need to contrast human plans with God's plans. We need to remember that dream-deniers only think about themselves. Dream-embracers recognize that something bigger than all of us is at work in our world and in our lives.

Let me illustrate this with a mental exercise I'd like you all to do. Remember old-fashioned beauty pageants in which the finalists had to answer a question for the judges? In the 1994 competition to crown Miss Columbia, finalist Tatiana Castro had to answer the following question. I'm going to give you a couple seconds to think about what you would say, if you were in her place in front of the crowd and the judges. "What would you save from a museum on fire: the famous paintings or the guard dog?" (Pause) As soon as she was asked this, Tatiana said, "Oh my god, the dog!" Then she went on to say: "The paintings are art and art, like love and peace, is to be given away. Animals, plants and people are life, and life is to be protected." The audience erupted in applause and she was crowned the winner.

Which to save: famous Rembrandts, Monets, Picassos, irreplaceable works of art, or a guard dog – by definition not particularly friendly, perhaps with a chain leash and muzzle? Do you answer the question by basing your decision on which item is worth more, since money in this world is always the bottom line? Tatiana, without hesitation, rejected that approach. She named a larger dream for life – a vision shaped by generosity. She insisted that things of beauty like art, like love, peace, laughter, joy, are meant to be shared and freely given away. But living things, animals, plants, children, the elderly, they are to be kept safe and protected. With her answer, Tatiana showed herself to be a true dreamer.

To be a person of faith is not simply to opt for one choice out of a range of equal options for life. It is to choose something bigger than anything else available in this world. It is to profess something that exceeds what we now see and certainly what we experience in this life. It is to trust in an expansive, all-encompassing dream that has been given to us by the God who is Lord of all life and all people.

Joseph did not die in the stone pit where his brothers had thrown him. He was eventually sold as a slave in Egypt, where his God-given ability to dream and interpret dreams changed the course of history. He warned Pharaoh that a period of seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of drought and the people should start preparing for

this now. His wisdom protected the nation of Egypt and allowed that land to become a haven when others were struggling, when other nations needed food and shelter, including Joseph's own family.

Centuries later, another dreamer would walk this earth. The Pharaohs of old had been replaced by Roman emperors, but the mindset was still the same: Might makes right. Wealth is king. There are only the powerful and the powerless, winners and losers. But the dreamer, Jesus of Nazareth, quietly offered a different vision for how the world should be. He said: "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful and the pure in heart, for they will see God." In a world of gold thrones and armored soldiers, Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these." As I mentioned earlier, Jesus didn't offer something that could be put in the balances of the world so that people could weigh it and choose if they liked that option. Jesus overturned the scales, shattered the priorities of the world, and offered a vision that exceeds anything this world can offer or hope to attain.

Let's go back to Mendeleev and his periodic table. As I mentioned, no one had succeeded in organizing the 63 known elements until Mendeleev dozed off, awoke, and shuffled his note cards into an early version of the periodic chart. The structure he created was so efficient that, years later as new elements were discovered, they literally filled in the gaps in Mendeleev's dream-inspired chart. When Niels Bohr updated the chart in 1922, he basically used the same format as Mendeleev and simply added in the elements discovered in the intervening 50 years. The shift to the modern periodic table came when Mendeleev's design was rotated 90 degrees and all 118 elements fit neatly into the diagram.

Mendeleev Periodic Table

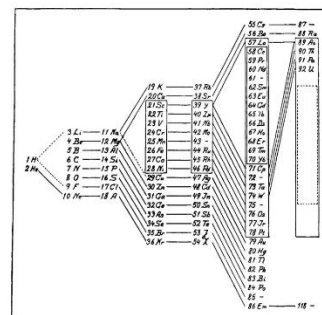
ОПЫТЪ СИСТЕМЫ ЭЛЕМЕНТОВЪ

ОСНОВАННОЙ НА ИХЪ АТОМНОМЪ ВѢСѢ И ХИМИЧЕСКОМЪ СХОДСТВѢ

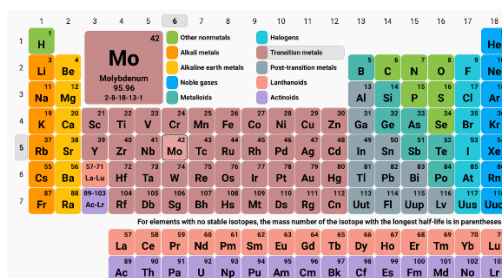
	Tl = 50	Zr = 90	? = 180.		
	V = 51	Nb = 94	Ta = 182		
	Cr = 52	Mo = 96	W = 186.		
	Mn = 55	Rh = 104,4	Pt = 197,4.		
	Fe = 56	Ru = 104,4	Ir = 198		
	Ni = 58	Co = 59	Pt = 106,6	Os = 199.	
H = 1	Cu = 63,4	Ag = 108	Hg = 200		
Be = 9,4	Mg = 24	Zn = 65,2	Cd = 112		
B = 11	Al = 27,4	? = 68	Ur = 116	Au = 197?	
C = 12	Si = 28	? = 70	Sn = 118		
N = 14	P = 31	As = 75	Sb = 122	Bi = 210?	
O = 16	S = 32	Se = 79,4	Te = 128?		
F = 19	Cl = 35	Br = 80	I = 127		
Li = 7	Na = 23	K = 39	Rb = 85,4	Cs = 133	Tl = 204
		Ca = 40	Sr = 87,6	Ba = 137	Pb = 207
		? = 45	Ce = 92		
		?Er = 56	La = 94		
		?Yt = 60	Di = 95		
		?In = 75,6	Th = 118?		

Д. Менделѣевъ

Bohr Periodic Table



Modern Periodic Table



That's the power of dreamers and it is precisely what dream-deniers fear the most. Dream-deniers only think about themselves – their immediate wants and needs, their narrow grievances and hurt feelings. Dreamers always see a much larger picture: a chart of 63 elements that one day would neatly hold 55 more in a perfect array. Just like Joseph's dream that warned one ruler to stockpile food so that his own land and the nations around him would not perish during a seven-year famine. Just like Jesus' expansive dream that describes a world inherited by the meek, where those who mourn are truly comforted, and where the poor are welcomed to seats of honor.

There are plenty of dream-deniers at work in Washington today. I have no intention of referencing their bad behavior every week for the next four years. Dream-deniers will always be in our midst, but they are at best footnotes in history. Dreamers are those who know that protecting global democracies has been the highest ideal of true Americans for generations. Dreamers know that alliances like NATO and the United Nations prevent wars and protect our nation from violence. Dreamers believe that soft diplomacy using medicine, food, and overseas aid workers builds a better world for children in every land. Dreamers sketch out visions for the future, guided by God's grace, that may have gaps in their diagrams, but they trust that future generations will fill in those blank spaces until a time when dreams of peace, justice, and prosperity are a reality at last.

Long, long ago, dream-deniers tried to kill Joseph. Long ago, dream-deniers did the same to Jesus. They taunted him when he described destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days. They mocked him with a crown of thorns. When he spoke about a coming kingdom of love and truth, they sneered rhetorically "What is truth?" And in their ultimate act of denial, they nailed Jesus to a cross. But God, the eternal dream-enabler, thwarted their plan by raising Jesus from the dead and opening the way for new dreams and new hope for us and all humanity.

Henry David Thoreau once said, "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them." The risen Christ has blessed us with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. In a world of dream-deniers, hold fast to your faith – put foundations under your castles in the air – and fill in the blank spaces in the dream God has placed on your heart. AMEN