

Dreams Do Come True.

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Dreams can be powerful things. Whether they are the conscience or unconscious kind, dreams can reveal truth and inspire powerful transformation. Many of us are Americans because our ancestors dreamed of making a life for themselves in America and took the risk of leaving their homes to come here, often with very little resources. That is the story of my great great great grandparents who immigrated to America from County Cavan in Ireland. Other dreams involve making changes to the world so that life is better for all people. That is the story of my great great grandfather who served in the Calvary for the Union in the Civil War and led a raid to capture the president of the confederacy. History tells us the raid was unsuccessful, because he and his men were ambushed by confederate soldiers, but he got all but six of his men out alive and no one was captured because he led a charge directly through the confederate soldiers. It was a daring move, and it's how he earned his nick name Daring Dick Woolsey.

Over time, the dreams that inspired my ancestors have traveled through my family history into my own life. Sometimes by telling their stories. Sometimes literally. One of my wedding gifts is the actual prayer book Daring Dick Woolsey carried in his saddle bags when he was serving in the war. It reminds me how his courage and desire to fight to end the evil of slavery in our country was rooted in his faith - something he and I share despite never having met. Though my great great grandfather is long gone, the dream lives on.

Dreams are powerful because dreams never die. Tomorrow we commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a man who is remembered for his dream of ending poverty, violence, and racial injustice. But Dr. King didn't only dream, he did what he could to work toward the dream and invited others to share the dream with him. This invitation can be heard or read in his many sermons, books, letters, and speeches. This time of year we most often remember his speech that came to be called "I Have a Dream". Perhaps one reason it's so well remembered is because it points to the truth of racial discrimination and injustice and how we all are less than we can be as long as racism and white supremacy exist. At the same time, his speech imagines a better day when we will see each other as beloved children of God, and invites us all to make that better day a reality. Only then, Dr. King prophesies, will we all truly be free.

If we look around, it's clear we still have a long way to go to get to that day, but the dream is still alive, and still inviting us into its truth. One day, it will come true.

Jesus referenced a very specific dream in today's Gospel because it is powerful, and he invited his new disciples into that dream because it had come true. To remember and understand the dream Jesus was talking about we must go back to the beginning, back to the first book in the Bible, the Book Genesis, and the story of two brothers named Esau and Jacob. Although they were twins, they were terrible at sharing and were always in competition with each other. Theirs is a story with lots of unhealthy family dynamics and conflict that you can read for yourself in chapters 25-28 in Genesis. But the part that Jesus referenced in today's Gospel was a dream Jacob had when he was at his lowest.

Jacob was a schemer, and his schemes finally got him in so much trouble he was kicked off the family land. He was on the run from his own brother who vowed to kill him. Jacob was alone, hungry, afraid, and exhausted. He stopped to sleep outside under the stars with only a rock to lay his head upon and as he slept he had a dream of a ladder so tall it went all the way to heaven and angels were going up and down the ladder. When he woke up, Jacob believed that dream meant God was with him in that place. So he used the rock he'd slept on to make a pillar to mark the place and named it "Bethel", which means "God's house" because it was a sort of gateway between heaven and earth.

Many years and generations later, scholars tell us, Bethel became a great sanctuary for worship because of Jacob's dream. The dream helped inform the belief that when you worship God in God's house, God is present with you and whether or not you see them, the angels come and go from that place because it is where heaven and earth meet. It's a powerful dream. And it's that same dream Jesus referenced at the end of the Gospel when he invited his disciples to come and see how this dream of Jacob's ladder was coming true in him.

We are now in the Season of Epiphany, a time the Church gives us to reflect on what the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh in Jesus reveals about him and about God. When Jesus invited his disciples to come and see in this portion of John's Gospel, this wasn't the invitation to witness Jesus ministry or even point to him as Messiah. Jesus' invitation was to see what it looks like when Jacob's dream had come true, when the gateway between heaven and earth was not a physical location or building, but Jesus himself, and through Jesus, God is present. That is what he was talking about when he said angels will be ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Often we prefer to see this section of John's Gospel as a "call story", one that might make us wonder about what God is calling us to. But I'm not sure that is what the author of John's Gospel intended. I wonder if instead of thinking about what good works we might take on, today's Gospel is an invitation to follow Jesus and those who follow Jesus will witness what it looks like when God is present, and heaven and earth are open to each other. In other words, it's an invitation to a way of life, a life of following Jesus who is God's dream come true in being present with all people, even those who only have a stone for a pillow.

In the Gospel readings we'll have in this season, and as we read the Gospels in general, we can see what it means that Jesus is the gateway between heaven and earth. Through that gateway came the holy, healing, love of God. As God present among us, Jesus did not hang out in palaces or gated communities. He went to those who were not religious, he hung out with people labeled outcast and sinners, and those who were ill. And whoever he was with he treated with respect, he listened, he forgave, he healed, he laughed, he shared food and drink and stories. Where there was fear and scarcity, he gave peace and abundance. Jesus included people the culture of his time would not have welcomed, like skeptics as we see in today's Gospel, women, and even people with more extreme views like zealots. He challenged the arrogant to consider God's nature as love and mercy instead of law.

As the gateway between heaven and earth, Jesus revealed God's dream was the healing of the breach between humanity and God, and in Jesus, that dream of repairing the divide had come true. As Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, through Jesus' death and resurrection, nothing, not violence, not threats of violence, not bad leaders, not our mistakes, not political corruption, not lies, not pandemics, nothing, not even death can keep us from the Love of God. As recipients of this holy, healing love, it is up to us to incarnate this love to the world, to embody God's dream, and help do the work of repairing the breach between one another.

This work begins by learning to recognize the moments when heaven and earth are open to each other. Those moments do happen. August 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, such a moment is said to have happened. That was when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the keynote address at the March on Washington for Civil Rights. Today we call that keynote address the "I Have a Dream" speech. The very speech where Dr. King said, "So I say to you, my friends, even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It's a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed that all men are created equal.... it's a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the south with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

As those words were spoken, Mrs. Coretta King once commented, "At that moment it seemed the Kingdom of God appeared. But it only lasted for a moment." Sometimes that is how God's dream comes true, one moment at a time. Because dreams never die, especially our dreams rooted in God's dream that came true in Jesus, moment by moment, those dreams will come true. It can happen, when we let those dreams live in our hearts, minds, souls, in our whole being.