

I have a dream

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Easter Day

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Acts 11.1-18

Revelation 21.1-6

John 13.31-35

Joy or Sorrow

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night with your mind full of a dream that has taken place?

Perhaps you can remember the events and the issues of the dream. Perhaps you are full of the emotions that have been stirred up. Perhaps you think it was only a dream and seek just go back to sleep. But it might be the dream is rather more significant.

The dream could have been about worries and events of your current life. It might be the best thing is to think the dream through and in doing so put it to one side so that it is no longer going to disturb you.

On the other hand the dream could have been about great joy and you have been made aware of opportunities that will transform your life. It might be worth resolving to not let these delights pass and see how you can make them real.

Talking about dreams might seem personal or even insubstantial but actually we all need to dream. One of the most powerful speeches in modern times began 'I have a dream...'. The speech was given by Martin Luther King and he spoke over and over again in the speech about his dream. He sought to rouse his nation to pay attention to the racial injustices of society and the need for action. That dream was so powerful it drove someone to kill him.

Dreams are not simply what happens at night. We are invited to have dreams about our future. We might say without a dream to guide us, our lives can be the poorer and we might feel there is no hope.

Peter's dream

In our reading from the book of Acts, the apostle Peter has a dream about a sheet full of animals. It may seem a little bizarre to our ears. The background is that the Jewish people of his day had some very clear boundaries. There were many animals they should not eat. In addition the nation saw themselves as God's people and only by accepting their ways could a person be

accepted by God. there was a distinction between the Jews and the rest they called the Gentiles.

In his dream, Peter is shown animals that are unacceptable to eat and a voice says eat them. This action means that one of these boundaries is being crossed.

This dream is then followed by a call for Peter to tell a gentile about Jesus. Here is one of these other boundaries being crossed. The person in question is not simply a gentile but a soldier of the Roman occupiers. When Peter tells him about Jesus not only does he accept this good news he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Through Peter, the infant church is being shown that what God has done in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection is available to the whole of humanity. Old boundaries of God's community are being broken down and God's purposes are being made available to all.

The book of Acts describes the way that the apostles, then joined by Saint Paul, take the good news of Jesus Christ far beyond the geographical boundary of Judea to the surrounding nations of the Greeks and the Romans. in his writings Saint Paul takes what had begun as a dream and explains how all people in all situations of life are welcomed as equals into the Kingdom of God.

In Galatians 3.28 Paul says

'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

The dream of Revelation

There were more wonderful words that we heard from the Book of Revelation:

'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

The Book of Revelation is almost one huge dream. It is part of a style of writing in the Bible called apocalyptic. With huge visions, monsters and tumultuous events, the purposes of God are described. People have spent much time puzzling over what it all means and seeking to share what they have learned. But these words I have selected resonate deeply with so many other passages from the Bible.

God is in the business of living with humans. This goes right back to the book of Genesis as he calls Abraham. God has purposes that will take away pain and suffering. This is expressed so powerfully with the events of the Exodus as Hebrew slaves are given freedom. Even death itself will be defeated. For the writers of the New Testament the resurrection of Jesus is a demonstration of this reality.

In our day and age the matters of faith can seem small. The world around says 'it's about your individual tastes and keep out of public life'. to this Revelation paints a picture of God being at large in the world with purposes that are about humans being fully alive. It is a dream with purposes against the tyrants who have no respect for most of the citizens of the world and the people of power who imagine they will not be held to account.

Revelation is a book to give strength to us when we feel small and brushed to one side.

The glory of Jesus

We have thought about Peter taking the good news of Christ into the world at large. It began as a dream and it continued as a great work to bring illumination to the darkness of the world. In our reading from John's Gospel Jesus talks about being glorified. The glory Jesus receives from the Father is the same as what Peter is in bringing the Roman Centurian to faith.

Certainly Jesus has a very high view of what is going to be taking place in his death and resurrection. He is bold in saying what God is doing through him.

On the other hand British people can make a great virtue to be modest. We are so quick to apologise, even if it isn't our fault. We prize the practise of being unselfish. If someone praises us we are quick to say how many others have helped us.

We heard Jesus speak of his glory and none of this modesty does he ask us to undertake. As civilised and respectful of others as these British ways might be, in a way they are about not doing things and Jesus commands us to go and do.

In our reading we heard Jesus say 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another' This is the glory of the Christian life. It begins with that message of Saint Peter coming to us that whoever we are there is acceptance, welcome and love. It is like a good parent giving care and

devotion to their child. From that experience we find it a joy to share this life with others. A sharing that is active, generous, robust and wholehearted. And in a delightfully away the more we share and give away the more full and satisfied we find ourselves. It was as Jesus gave himself to the cross that he then received the prize of resurrection. As we love one another the relationships and substance of our community grows.

So I ask, having spoken so much of dreams, 'are these words of Jesus themselves a dream?' Jesus says 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another'. These words certainly seem aspirational and pointing towards the future. I dare say as much as we might admire them, there is still a great deal to be turned into reality.

If they are a dream what sort of dream are they? For some people they might come as a nightmare! To be commanded to love appears so unworldly and a demand of which we can only fall short. There are the fears of being ruled by tyrant. But that is not the nature of God we see in Jesus. We are invited to accept so much better.

For other people these words of Jesus are a dream of heaven. In their lives they've had a foretaste having been accepted when they feared rejection. A door had been opened and they know they can leave the dungeon of loneliness and shame. This is the nature of God.

Dream afresh

There is a criticism made of people of faith that they are so heavily minded they are of no earthly use. We can be people who react against this by very quickly saying 'but what should we do?'

But I think we should be people who begin with a dream. We have found the glory of God. But these dreams are not of escape or pretend. They are dreams of a mature love Dreams that have grasped how delightful even when difficult life can be. A dream that can grasp the divine value of the person in front of them but know it might take time and understanding for it to be revealed.

But even more than this the true dream may come to us as a gift and not of our creation. because this dream is more than we can imagine and it might take some rearrangement in our lives for us to accept it. This is why we worship, pray, read scripture and receive bread and wine. In these things dreams are formed and of these dreams; hurt is healed, heaven is discovered and love is understood and flourishes.