

Easter April 21,2019  
Rev. Jane Florence  
“God’s Dream Lives”



The first writing of what we call “Easter” comes to us from Saint Paul. Paul was the first to write of Jesus of Nazareth, and he wrote several decades after Jesus was killed. Of the first Post-Easter story, Paul simply said, “Jesus was raised and has appeared to many.” Jesus was raised and has been experienced by many. That’s all Paul says.

I was visiting with a family following a death of an elderly gentleman. The ten year old granddaughter was present. She looked at me with wide eyes and asked me what would happen to her grandpa now. I recalled the words of Paul who said what we sow to the ground is a seed what rises is something altogether different. So I spoke to the granddaughter of the autumn leaves that fall to the earth and the new green shoots that grow in the spring. I spoke about the seeds that we plant and the flowers which bloom. Then, I smiled at her. My words were quite lovely, I’m sure. This was the point that she was to nod her head and squeeze my hand in understanding. A Hallmark moment in the making, I thought. Instead, she continued her unwavering stare and replied, “ Oh I know all that stuff. We learned about seeds in preschool. I want to know what will happen to grandpa.”

Have you ever been stared down by a precocious ten year old? She was not being rude or mischievous; she just wanted the truth. Her grandpa wasn’t an autumn leaf or a flower seed. She wasn’t taking any theological horticulture for an answer. She would settle for nothing less than the truth.

Then something else that Paul wrote came to mind. Just before he wrote of the resurrection in this lovely agricultural imagery, he said, “<sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully.” (1 Corinthians 13: 12)

In truth, we just don’t know fully. So that’s what I told her. To that, she nodded and squeezed my hand and smiled, and said, ‘ ok.’ an honest, ‘I don’t know exactly’ was an acceptable answer.

In truth, there’s a lot we just don’t know. What we have in our scriptures are ancient stories of peoples who did the best they could to try and put into words something that they experienced that was – quite frankly, beyond words. Our scriptures are the best efforts of poets and prophets and storytellers to share their understandings of their experiences of Divine Creator and all that is as they see in the mirror dimly.

I grew up going to church. I’ve been a pastor for twenty years. I’ve been to a lot of Easter services. I doubt that any one of them has opened with a song other than “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” It is a beautiful song. I love it because it doesn’t give us a single, simple theology answer. It sings of deep truth leaving great the space of mystery. Everyone here can sing and each can have your own nuances of understandings.

Too often Christians get caught up on a singular perspective - then we argue and we fight on whose got it right and who doesn’t. Then we look like anything but - disciples who complete Jesus teaching to love one another. It’s sad, most Christians are really fighting about who’s going to heaven and whose not and how and how not - each claiming to have the answer to that 10 year old’s question- what’s next?

I invite you to imagine for a minute or two - that the reason we gather here might not have anything to do with who has the right answer and who gets to heaven and who doesn't. For a few minutes let's just take that question off the table.

Let's just say, for arguments sake, that everyone is going to heaven. Somehow, somehow, everyone is caught up in the Divine grace of the Universe. Let's just say everyone's ticket is secured into whatever it is you image as afterlife. If we can imagine that, then the purpose of our faith, of our religion, of our worship would NOT be about getting to heaven. Then we are not here to earn our frequent flier worship miles- redeemable at pearly gates. With that worry off the table, we are left asking, so what is the point in religion, faith, spirituality- call it what you wish? If and when, it's not about life after this body is done, is there something else? Is there some other reason we might gather? Some other reason we might worship? Some other meaning to sing "Christ the Lord is Risen today?"

Archbishop Desmond Tutu offers one response. He says the point of Christian faith is God's dream. That's the title of a great theological book he wrote.<sup>1</sup> It looks like a children's book; it's found in the children's book section. Its pages are sturdy with much better pictures than any of my seminary textbooks. The theology is as sturdy as the pages and the pictures are as true as any images found in scripture. He says God's dream is when all God's children laugh and play together and see God in one another.

God's dream is of a whole new world where all people and even all of nature are filled with God's love, God's freedom, God's joy, and God's life. This dream is difficult for us to imagine. Maybe that's why Desmond Tutu wrote it on sturdy pages with easy pictures, because the children can still imagine it and teach us the truth.

As the prophet Isaiah put it, God's Dream includes Visions of a new heaven and a new earth. It is visions of children living past infancy and weeping ceasing for all time. It is visions of houses inhabited by those who labor to put roofs on them. It is visions of those who pick the vegetables having food enough on their tables too. It is visions of weapons of war being hammered into tools for gardening. It is visions of the wolf and the lamb, enemies eating together- not devouring one another, but eating side by side in peace.

While that may seem too utopian a dream to put much stock in, while it may seem like so much "pie in the sky" wishful thinking. Other prophets proclaimed God's dream too. God's sons and daughters through the ages have carried God's dream.

Jesus understood God's dream of release of the captives, of recovery of sight for those who can't see their way forward, of freedom for the oppressed, of the year of the Lord's favor for the poor. Jesus dreamed of inclusion of the outcast and healing for the sick. Jesus dreamed of a reversal of power structures of injustice. It is a beautiful dream - this God's Dream. Jesus got so caught up in it, he just wouldn't let it go. He dared to announce it. He dared to say, it's time had arrived. He dared to put actions behind God's dream and to hang on to it even when others tried to beat it out of him. The Dream became woven into his very essence. Since, they couldn't beat it out of him, so they killed him.

He was executed by the Roman government in order to keep the powerful in control and silent God's dream that was taking root in the heart of common people. His execution was not a lethal injection, or an electric chair. There were no worries about 'cruel or unusual punishment'. They hung him on a tree. It's a high price to pay for God's dream. God's beautiful dream of peace and justice was nailed to a tree. The state doesn't execute

---

<sup>1</sup> Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams. *God's Dream*. Candlewick Press. 2008.

philosophers or dreamers or visionaries; the state executes political threats. His vision of a new way was a threat to the Empire and the status quo. The powers that be thought they could kill the dream when they killed the man.

Human greed and fear and power thought they could kill God's dream. We humans give ourselves a lot of credit—sometimes. We think we are strong enough to kill God's dream of equality and justice, but we doubt we are strong enough bring it to life. God's Dream didn't not die with Jesus. Spirit of Goodness in the Universe doesn't let the Divine dream of Goodness just die. The Spirit of Christ kept the dream alive, and the Spirit of Christ whispers it in our hearts again and again. Other prophets have heard it since - other sons and daughters of God have birthed it forward.

Once upon a time, some Prophets dreamed “of a nation on a new continent conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal.”<sup>2</sup> Maybe their dream was even bigger than they imagined.

One Prophet dreamed God's dream when “sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood” and people will be judged by the content of their character not the color of their skin.<sup>3</sup>

Prophets dreamed of the end to apartheid. They dreamed of walls dividing east and west of a city tumbling down. Sometimes the prophets get killed dreaming such things and working to make God's dream real.

The Easter story proclaims over and over that God's dream will not die. God's dream lives as God's spirit continues to live. The good news of Easter is that if we can rise above anxiously worrying about “going to heaven,” and who else will get in or not, then we can devote ourselves to the Divine's dream of the new heaven and the new earth the prophets have been singing for thousands of years. If we can rise above worrying about our next life, we can hear Our Creator's dream for us in this one. And We can see God's dream sprouting like new green buds poking through the sleeping soil. We see them this week just sprouting, some in bloom but some not fully realized in full bloom; but there ready to spring forth and promising something new each in its own time.

Easter means death is not the end. There is something more to life. There is something more than sorrows, and loneliness, and brokenness, and greed and violence. There is something more than eating and sleeping and working and dying in a tomb of complacency. There is something more than the heartache when a loved one leaves us, more than the despair when an illness strikes us, more than frustration with work and finances and busy calendars. There is something that the powers of this world, the political powers, the institutional powers, the cultural powers, the meanness in this world just cannot kill.

We see sprouts of God's dream alive, when homeless are fed at the Malone Center. We see shoots of God's dream alive, when Clinic with a Heart offers medical care for the impoverished. We see buds of God's dream living, when our youth and college students serve on mission trips, when our United Methodist Women offer challenging programs and mission giving. We see fruits of God's dream when our Cherished Friends visit those unable to be present in their beloved community. Yes, God's dream lives. but God's dream is not complete. God's dream continues.

---

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Lincoln. “The Gettysburg Address. “

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. “I Have a Dream”

God dreams of the time when Israeli and Palestinian children will walk together in friendship. God dreams that young people will know a sense of belonging in community that they no longer need a gang to give them identity. God dreams that weapons on our streets and in our closets and under our beds will all be melted down into jewelry and shovels and tools for planting and growing food. God dreams all people can go to school, work, shopping, home and play without fear. God dreams everyone will have the ability to see a doctor when sick and all people will have safe places to live, and no one sleeps in gutters, under bridges, in cardboard boxes. God dreams that the lush, green earth will be honored as sacred and holy, and the air will be pure and clean once more, and the water will be clear and flowing for all.

The Easter story tells us that God's dream is not a ghost. It is not wishful thinking. It is not pie-in-the-sky for some future life. The Easter story names us all Easter people, and it places God's dream in our heart and in our hands. As it reveals the power of God who will lead us into new life to bring God's dream alive on this earth. It is a dream that calls us out of our tombs of complacency and calls us forth to life. Some say that's all fine for a children's book, but God's dream is too big! too impossible!

The Apostle Paul tells us how God's dream works. We start by putting to death to anger and wrath. We remove the cloth of malice and slander that bind us in tombs of ego. We rise up and leave our old stinking death clothes of fear and worry behind. We bring to life kindness, humility and patience. We don't do it alone. We can't do it by our own determination and good intentions.

God's dream will live in the world today when we allow- when we offer ourselves- to Way Jesus lived and taught. It happens when we join in community with one another to remind and encourage and share in the journey and living God's beautiful dream for all now. That's the point. That's why we gather here to worship. We open ourselves to new life and new ways of living, then we become the delightful people God envisioned and God created us to be.

When we live as Easter people then Easter is not a single event 2,000 years ago. Easter is Christ the Lord alive today. Easter is an everyday Spirit of the Divine - living within us and through us. Easter is Emmanuel, God with us. Hallelujah!