

January 25, 2009

Remember the Dream!

Texts: Daniel 2:1-6, 10-12, 16-23

8:00 a.m. – St. James United Methodist Church
Kansas City, Missouri

Annual Pulpit Exchange Sunday

Sermon by Dr. Robert Lee Hill

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Introduction

Good morning, and please know what a pleasure and an honor it is to be with you this Sunday morning! Greetings from the brothers and sisters at Community, who will welcome Rev. Cleaver and the Daybreak Choir and any and all St. Jamesians in our 10:30 service, and if they are able and willing, to be our guests at a luncheon at which one of our members, Marva Eberhart, will be sharing her mission experiences from her time in Ghana last summer. We would cherish the opportunity to welcome any and all of the members of St. James to share worship with us.

I must also extend these introductory remarks by telling you how blessed I have been to know both Rev. Cleavers who have blessed you and are blessing you anew with their mighty ministries. The past 20 years of this pulpit exchange have blown by like a shooting star. It seems like only yesterday when I met “Dr. III,” who was then simply “E III,” in the old sanctuary. And now here he is beyond merely the cusp of a great consummation and fully involved in transformation of St. James into its next glorious chapters of on-going excellent witness. And while Rev. Emanuel Cleaver II will be with us this morning, we look forward to greeting you, “Dr. III,” next year, as the torch will be fully passed to your hand.

And to my dear friend and colleague Rev. Emanuel Cleaver II, all I have to say to you is “I don’t know how you’ve done it, being a Congressman and pastor here at St. James!” As the mantle is passed fully come June, please know that you’ll always have a pulpit away

from your home pulpit, if you so choose, at Community Christian Church.

This morning I want to offer a brief word about “Remembering The Dream.”

The Importance of Dreams

All doctors, and especially psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, will tell us that dreaming is important.

Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung, the major driving forces behind modern psychology, both agreed that dreaming is important for human functioning, for overall human health and well-being. Each in his own way held to the notion that dreaming is the working out in an unconscious state of unresolved issues from our waking hours. Freud stated pointedly that dreaming fully, and not remembering what you dreamed about, was perhaps the best kind of dreaming, helping us to bring closure to unresolved matters from our daytime lives.

Each person here this morning, I am sure, can recall when you had a dream, whether or not you recalled all the definitive contours or detailed story lines of the dream, and it left you refreshed the next day. Dreaming is important, in fact, crucial for human health and well-being.

For example, I’m still dreaming of wearing my wedding ring. Seven months after I shattered my wrist in a bicycle accident back in June, I still can’t put my wedding ring on my ring finger. And while it doesn’t bother Priscilla, I don’t quite yet feel right. I keep dreaming of the day when I can return the ring to its rightful place on my ring finger.

The dreams of our childhood, which we work out in our waking hours, are also

extraordinarily and excruciatingly important. When I was a young tow-headed boy growing up in Brownsville, Texas, I had two dreams: (1) to play centerfield either for the San Francisco Giant (like Willie Mays) or for the New York Yankees (like Mickey Mantle); and (2) to have a Zippo lighter like the *pachucos* did in my neighborhood. Imagine my satisfaction, then, when, lo and behold, I had achieved half of my life goals by the time I was eighteen!

Dreaming has been important, metaphorically and poetically speaking, for countless folks involved in faithful struggles for liberation and freedom's fulfillment. We are here this morning, in fact, engaged in this pulpit exchange, because of the dreaming activity of our respective congregations. Leaders among both of our family of faiths have held fervently to the dream that we are, as Robert Putnam puts it, "*Better Together*" and that we'd rather not be "*Bowling Alone*."

Carl Sandburg understood the importance of dreams for human personality and as one of the significant forces that drive human progress when he said, "*Nothing happens unless first we dream*."

Thoreau knew the importance of dreams when he declared "*Do not lose hold of your dreams or aspirations. For if you do, you may still exist but you have ceased to live*."

Howard Thurman would give a shimmering description of the nation of Israel and its monotheism when, in his very first book, *The Greatest of These*, a gathering of dreamy meditations on the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians, he described the Israelites as the "*keepers of the one-God dream*."

And during this past week, as Caroline Kennedy withdrew her name from consideration for the open Senate seat in New York and Senator Ted Kennedy was whisked away to the hospital in the middle of the celebratory luncheon in Statuary Hall in Washington, who could not have recollected the renowned aphorism from Bernard Shaw made eternally famous by Bobby Kennedy more than a generation ago: "*Some men see*

things as they are and say, 'Why?' I dream of things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

Yes, dreams are important—biomedically, physically, developmentally, poetically, politically.

We realized the importance of dreams once again this past Tuesday, when the inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama as the 44th President of the United States of America was happily and joyfully accomplished. At that dramatic moment the long-awaited fulfillment of a million dreams over the past 233 years of our nation's blemished and yet beautifully blessed experiment with democracy had arrived. The hopes of so many – those who voted for President Obama, along with all those who yearned for America's promise to be realized more completely – had come upon a threshold of attainment.

It was a moment when the dreams of so many who died were satisfied. These were the dreams of those "*who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life*" and fell on fields of battle in defense of our nation and those who never tasted freedom's full savor and suffered death by exhaustion or an assassin's bullet along the highways and byways toward freedom.

It was a moment in which the dreams of common Americans – particularly those born without privilege or position, those launched on their paths without monetary advantage, those without famous family names or the highest political pedigree – were rekindled.

Yes, many said, the dream has been realized, at least partially, in the parading arrival of President Barack Obama, along with Michelle, Malia, and Sasha, as residents at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

And yet, and yet.... I have come by here this morning to remind us all to "Remember the Dream." For too many folks, I'm afraid, may be prone to believe and then act as if the dream that Dr. King dreamed about so eloquently in 1963 – and that had been borne so nobly by the likes of A. Phillip Randolph, and Howard Thurman, and Marcus Garvey, and Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth, and Abraham

Lincoln – had been fully accomplished. We still need to keep on dreaming!

Just this past Wednesday, two things happened that are quite notable. One was a sign of the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream, and the other a sign that we need to keep on dreaming. The first was that I received a phone call from a member of Community who happens to be African-American. Forty years ago that kind of interchange might not have taken place at Community. The second thing that took place was the report from that same member that one of his children at a Johnson County middle school had been placed on a two-day in-school suspension. The reason for the suspension? He had been shoved that day by a white student – two days after the Martin Luther King holiday and the day after the inauguration of President Barack Obama – and when the shoving took place, the white student said "Move n_ _ _ _!" "What in the h _ _ _ did you say," he replied. The white student shoved him, and then the young man shoved back. And then they were in the principal's office. Now the father of the young boy who suffered from the racial slur did not take kindly to his son's use of the "H" word, but he was wounded in his heart at the idea that something so pathetically puny as a racial slur could be slung at his son. Of course, The utterance by the young white boy, "Move n_ _ _ _!" – the result of some stupid teaching and because the boy was flippantly caught up in saying something he heard someone else say – is bonafide evidence that we need to keep on dreaming. And the lackluster punishment for the offenses – the racial slur and the physical altercation – was further evidence of the need for all of us to remember the dream and not be satisfied the dream has been achieved. A golden opportunity for teaching was missed. The white boy could have been instructed to write a 500 word essay about the dangers of the hurtful, hate-filled language of racial epithets. And our member's son – who is also a young man to whom I give a hug every Sunday after services – could have been instructed to write a 500 word essay on how

Dr. King would have handled his situation differently than he had. Instead of a learning opportunity, only a two-day suspension. We still need to remember the dream!

The book of Daniel tells the story about the importance of dreams and their interpretations. Dreams and dreaming are mentioned more in the book of Daniel than in any other book in the Bible. The book of Daniel tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon during the sixth century BCE, who was visited by dreams he could not understand and had somehow forgotten. Nebuchadnezzar calls forth the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to divine his dreams and their meanings and none can perform the impossible tasks. Except for Daniel and his cohorts, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, later to be known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel is one who can divine dreams and offer interpretation. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel sees and remembers the dreams that have been visited the king and can offer interpretation. And best of all he remembers from whence Nebuchadnezzar's dreams come: *"Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever... to whom belong wisdom and might.... he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge...he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him."*

To wit, he knows not only the substance (the *what*) of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams but *from whom* all holy dreams come.

Daniel stands in a long line of dreamers, dream interpreters, and dream rememberers. You know them too. Can you recall?

Remember Jacob who dreamed of a ladder leading up to God and – in a dream-like state – wrestled with an angel and was given a new name, Israel.

Daniel stands also with Joseph, who had magnificent and powerful capacities when it came to dreams and helped to bring stability and hope to Egypt when it was assaulted by famine.

Daniel stands as well with Amos who dreamed of a new ethic of holiness for all of

God's people and declared *"let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."*

And Daniel stands with the prophet Joel who proclaimed that young men (and women) shall see visions and old men (and women) shall dream dreams, a proclamation that Peter would later use as his text in his Pentecost sermon.

Daniel stands also with Joseph, the carpenter, husband of Mary, who listened to the dreams that visited him and thereby secured the baby Jesus' safety so that he could grow up fully into his Messiahship.

And he stands with other dreamers like the apostle Paul who dreamed in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians of *"a more excellent way,"* love, that *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things;"* and then, in his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul told them of the dream of God *"no longer counting their trespasses against them"* and the beautiful green dream of *"reconciliation."*

Daniel ultimately stands in the line of witnesses that leads straight to Jesus who dreamed of salvation for all, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever should believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him."* (John 3:16-17)

Yes, Daniel reminds us all that it is not merely the REM (Rapid Eye Movement) observed by medical dream researchers that is important for the well-being of humanity and the world. It is also the REM (Righteous Energizing Mystery) that quickens the soul and inspires actions of justice and mercy and love and matters most to God.

In short, Daniel reminds us that the ultimate dreamer is not Daniel or Nebuchadnezzar or Jacob or Joseph or Joel or Amos, or any of the other prophets. The premier dreamer of all time is not the apostle Paul, or any of the twelve. The ultimate dreamer is God Almighty, who stepped out on the nothing of all emptiness and said, in the

words of James Weldon Johnson, "I'll make me a world." He might as well have said "I'll dream me a world."

So remember the dream! Remember that it is God's dream that we are called to remember, a dream of wholeness and wellness and care and compassion, a dream of love and mercy and full righteousness. Remember the dream.

God's dream is a dream expressed in the American dream but not bound to it, for there are others who are also God's children, "who are not of this flock." Remember the dream.

God's dream is for every child to have sufficient food and proper shelter and excellent education. Remember the dream.

God's dream is for Uzi machine guns to be beaten into fuel-efficient cars and nuclear weapons into college educations. Remember the dream.

It is God's dream that the earth be preserved and honored instead of being exploited and despoiled. Remember the dream.

It is God's dream that all people - black folks and white folks, Jews and Gentiles, Protestant and Catholic, Israelis and Palestinians, Yankees and Southerners, Kansas City Chiefs and Oakland Raiders - grow up into a mature humanity and sing together and work together and play together and share together. Remember the dream.

So God bless Martin Luther King! And God bless President Barack Obama! And God bless our pulpit exchange this year and every year! But praise be ultimately to God who is the original dreamer of a world come of age in peace and grace and truth. Remember the dream! Remember the dream! Remember the dream!