

Sermon: **GOD'S DREAM FOR THE WORLD**

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Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. day. We remember him for that speech in which he said "I have a dream:" he laid out this dream for America that wasn't quite the way we are but the way it was intended to be. A place in which people are judged by the content of their character not the color of their skin.

He laid out this dream that was particularly a hope that we would overcome the three great intertwined social evils of racism, and poverty and war. Now that dream wasn't just a picture to hang on the wall. He wasn't just sort of philosophizing or fantasizing. That dream was a call to action. What he was laying out there was a dream that we are supposed to join him to build a nation like that's in that dream. And millions of people did. And that civil rights movement throughout the sixties changed the world because they followed that dream.

Now Martin Luther King Jr. didn't make that dream up. That wasn't his. He stole it. He got it from somewhere else. Where do you suppose he got it? The bible!

Some people forget that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was actually the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. He was a preacher. He was a biblical scholar. He got it from the bible.

From the very beginning all the way to the end God has a dream for the world. God has an intent for the way God wants the world to be. It's a world of peace, and when God talks about peace it doesn't mean quiet, it doesn't mean lockdown. When God talks about peace – shalom – it means the mutual interwoven well being of all beings. That's what God means by peace, this profound belonging and harmony and sharing. And this is a world of justice. And again when God talks about justice, justice doesn't mean what we think of as criminal justice— we think of justice as revenge— that everybody gets what they deserve. Not God, because there's no such thing as deserving. There is no such thing as deserving. God lives in the present, not the past. For God justice means that everybody has what they need. So when God creates the Earth it says very specifically about this in Genesis that every creature had every green plant for food. Everybody has enough. Everybody has what they need.

When Jesus talks about God's dream for the world, this dream of a world of peace and mercy and justice and grace his word for it is the kingdom of God. That's what Jesus means by the kingdom of God, the realm of God, the reign of God, the empire of God, the realm of heaven. It doesn't matter how you translate those phrases. What Jesus is talking about is God's dream for

the world. He's not talking about the afterlife. Jesus really doesn't care about being dead. He's not talking about an exclusive club for religious insiders that if you're good you can get into. What he's talking about is God's dream for the whole world. Just like Martin Luther King's dream was a dream for the country, not just for a few black people.

Now Jesus knew, and we can tell right away, that this dream that God has for the world hasn't come about yet. There are problems. Because human beings have a hard time trusting the grace of God and we become fearful and that fear, that distrust, is what we call sin. And the sin doesn't mean we are evil, it just means that we're afraid. But in our fear we make all sorts of bad judgments. We abandon our belonging to God's dream and we get focused just on ourselves, because we're afraid and we start grabbing things and we start pushing other people away and we start blaming things on other people. It's our fear that is the source of all human evil. It's the source of all stealing and lying and murder and adultery. It's the source of society's economic injustice that creates poverty and discrimination and racism and war and violence. It all comes from that fear.

So when Jesus proclaims this dream that God has for the world and says "the realm of heaven has drawn near," Jesus also has to say "repent." You need to shift from this life of fear to a life of trust in God. And that's a big change, and Jesus knows that. We have to stop living in the old way and start living in a new way. Repentance is something that we continually need to do. We need to continually let go of things we've become attached to and attach ourselves instead simply to trusting God.

That's why it's deeply symbolic that when Jesus is walking along the beach and he sees Peter and Andrew and he calls them, "immediately," Matthew says, "they left their nets." He could have just said they followed him but Matthew has to say they left their nets and followed him. There was some letting go going on there. Jesus walks on a little farther and he sees James and John the sons of Zebedee and he calls them and Matthew says "they left their boat and they left their father." Imagine what that might have been like for Zebedee. He's sitting there in the boat mending his nets with his kids, you know running the fishing business, and this guy comes along and starts talking to his kids and all of a sudden, wait, wait hold on, the kids are getting out of the boat and Zebedee standing up and saying, "Boys, we got some work to do! Boys, come back... Boys!... Boys!,,,," What must that have been like to watch those guys just take off over the horizon with Jesus and leave him sitting there in the boat? What must that have been like for them? For that voice to have echoed in their minds as they followed Jesus, that voice that says "come on back, come on back, we know how to do this-- we know how to do that."

Now for us we probably don't have to let go of our livelihoods or our families, so what's Jesus asking us to let go of? Most likely one of the first things that we have to let go of is a sense that we know what we're doing. Jesus is asking us to let go of that and go out into an unknown

place where we don't know what's coming next. You know what that's like. I don't have to suggest that to you. You know what it's like to not know what's coming next. This entire country is in an intense phase of not knowing WHAT the heck is coming next. And regardless of how you feel about the incoming administration it's guaranteed that they're going to be unpredictable. Everybody is waiting to see how this works out. In your own family you know you don't know what's coming next. In our church we don't know what's coming next. The church is changing, the world is changing, the members in the church are changing, our lives are changing. Jesus is inviting us to let go of those old fishing nets that we know how to work with and step into something that we don't know. Jesus knows this. He has already done that himself. Did you notice that first before Jesus asked the disciples to let go and leave their place and follow him, Jesus did? He left his home town and went to Capernaum. He's already practiced this. Now he's in a new, unfamiliar place.

And Jesus is inviting us to let go of the notion that everybody's going to feel good about what we're doing. It's not going to happen. Jesus reminds us over and over again. People keep trying to tell him to stop. Even his family comes to him and says "we think you're kind of crazy, come home, knock it off." And Jesus has to fight against that and say "Nope, I am following God's dream, not yours." People are not always going to be happy with us, because in fact whenever we speak out for justice the forces of injustice are going to resist. Whenever we want to change the status quo, the status quo will fight back.

So Martin Luther King endured a lifetime of accusations and threats and hate mail and bricks through his window and arrests and beatings until finally he was killed-- because the force of evil will do that to people who work for good. It will fight against us. Jesus experienced that, the prophets experienced that. That's why he said "blessed are you when people persecute you." It's going to happen.

Jesus is inviting us to let go of feeling like we get to be safe. To really follow Jesus means to take some risks. To know that people are going to push back. So, for instance, we've had this Black Lives Matter sign in the yard. Some people in the church decided we really needed that and they put it out there. Now I know it wasn't a really well done decision. A lot of people sort of saw the sign and said "wait, how did that get there?" But it got put there and then you know what happened? Somebody stole it. Well, we have more than one sign. So we put another sign out there. And then you know what happened? Somebody stole it. And then you know what happened? We put another sign out and somebody stole a third sign. I'm going to report it to the police as a hate crime. Somebody does not want us to express our opinion. That's what you get when you speak out for justice. You get serious push back. We're seeing it all around; all throughout the country. If you speak out for justice don't think you're going to be safe. Don't think you won't have to take a risk, make some sacrifices. People will say "Don't be

divisive.” *They’re* the ones who are being divisive. It is not divisive to state an opinion. It is divisive to say someone else's opinion doesn't belong. So we're up against that. Jesus knows that. So other than being really tough skinned, what do we do about that?

The most important thing is to stay true to the dream, to stay focused on *why* we're doing what we're doing. And the second most important thing is to stay in it with each other. We need each other. You notice that when Jesus called the disciples he called them two at a time. He called two brothers. And then he called two more brothers and then they become brothers with each other and pretty soon he's got a dozen people and they are all siblings and then Mary Magdalene and Joanna— they all become siblings in Christ. We're going to need each other in this.

At Saint Matthews we really, really need each other. Like I've said, the church is changing, needs are changing, what the world is asking of the church is changing. We have our opportunity now to listen for God's dream for Saint Matthews. And we're all going to have to listen for that together. Nobody alone can decide that. I have some ideas, you have some ideas. Those are likely to be wrong. It's God's ideas that really matter. So we're going to have to let go of a lot of things and join together and listen together for God's dream for Saint Matthews.

We have some clues. Scripture gives us a couple of big fat clues. God's dream for the church is that we are a bold voice for justice in the world. God says, “Behold my servant, who brings forth justice.” God doesn't stop talking about peace and justice from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Every page it's there. What it might look like for us to be a bold witness for justice would be that there is somebody out there in the world, who is poor, or black, or an immigrant, or a Muslim, or queer or struggling in life, and they can say, “Saint Matthew's is there for me.” We've made a difference in their lives. Not just that we think so but that we're out there enough that they know that. Now that's my dream but is it God's dream for us? We have to talk about that.

I have a dream for Saint Matthews that this is a place where people are fearless explorers on the spiritual frontier. That we are not afraid to go deep in our relationship with God and learn and grow together, and share that journey with one another and learn from each other. Is that our shared dream? I can't say. We will have to discern together.

We need everybody. We need the people who want the Back Lives Matter sign and the people who don't. We need the people who like this kind of music and that kind of music. The people who want this kind of church and that kind of church. The people who have been here for forty five years and the people who have been here for two weeks. We need everybody, because it's only then that we can really discern not just my desires and my preferences and my hopes, but God's dream for Saint Matthews. And we have to hear that.

God is calling this church and we have to answer. We can't just say "Well, I'll think about it." Then that's our answer, that's our "no." You can't just sit in the boat. You have to either get out of the boat or say "no." And Jesus is in our face saying "Saint Matthews, I need you."

And here's the trick. Jesus is not recruiting for some little exclusive club; this is not a religious test to see if whether or not you get into Heaven. This is Jesus saying "I see God's dream for the world. I'm devoted to it. I will give my life to it —but I can't do it alone." Jesus goes to those disciples and Jesus comes to Saint Matthews saying "I need to do this, will you help me? I can't do it without you. Will you follow me? Will you come? It's going to be hard, people are going to hate you, people won't understand, but this is how we heal the world. Will you come with me?" And we have to answer yes or no. But the Lord will see us through.