

Sermon
Jan 16, 2022
John 1: 29-39
“Dreams”

As you can tell from the Call to Worship and the Prayer of Invocation, today we are remembering the dreams and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr..

Listen to a few excerpts from his famous speech in 1963. “I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

*“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin **but** by the content of their character.”*

Like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., God has a dream for us too - our scripture today has John the Baptist testifying to **who** God’s ‘Chosen One’ is - he is pointing the way to the one who can set us free, the one who can show us the ways of God. In Jesus, God reveals to us....so that we can physically see...God’s dream for

each of us. God's dream of a world where there is justice and peace; a world where everyone is free to grow and to love; to have safe shelter, and enough to eat.

The Gospel of John begins with these words: "The Word became flesh and Lamb of God lived among us." In our scripture today John the Baptist says, as he points to Jesus "Look, the Lamb of God". This phrase "Lamb of God" is often interpreted as a sacrifice for our sin; yet, I read an interesting commentary written by Gail O'Day and Susan Hulen that points out that lambs were not used for sin sacrifice they were only used for the Passover Sacrifice. Passover celebrates and remembers the liberation of the Hebrew people by God from slavery in Egypt. O'Day and Hulen go on to say, (quote) "thus, Jesus **liberates** the world **from** slavery to sin by bringing the world into new and fresh contact with the presence of God, so that human alienation from God can end." (unquote) In this thinking - Jesus didn't come to die for our sins.....Jesus came to liberate, to free us from our sins by showing us the ways of God.Ponder that idea - Jesus came to liberate us; not die for us!

When the two disciples following John asked Jesus "Where are you staying?" Jesus responds with grace and invites them to "come and see". Jesus

doesn't demand that they believe John's words. He tenderly invites them to get to know him and to be in a relationship with him; Jesus actually invites them to where he lives. He knows that once they come to know him, really know him, their lives will be **transformed**.

Now, if you think about it isn't that really the scary part!! Their lives, our lives will be transformed - we will be changed when we are in a relationship with Jesus!! The disciples go with Jesus, they respond to Jesus' invitation to "Come and see".

We say that we want to know Jesus, that we want to be disciples...but then it comes to our attention that there is or might be a cost to discipleship. So often we want to grow, and move forward....but we don't want to let go of the old.

In our scripture reading today, John testifies that Jesus is the One. (I quote) And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I myself (said John) have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (unquote)_ Like we talked about last week – John had an epiphany – he was told what to look for and he recognized – Jesus as the Holy One. John had waited – he had told people over and over again that he

was not the one – that someone greater than he was coming. And here, in this scripture reading his hope, his dream, of finding the Messiah came true.

Unlike Martin Luther King Jr.. who preached about freedom, equality, justice and love, John the Baptist preached about repentance and turning from sin. It was the one who followed him, Jesus – that spoke of equality, justice for all and love. Martin Luther King Jr.’s main teaching was that of equality and human rights for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and all victims of injustice through peaceful protest. His dream was so very aligned with Jesus’ dream.

Similarly, we want the church, our church to be Jesus’ heart, hands and feet right here in our community. But, like the disciples we get scared and don’t really want to be “transformed” or changed. We hesitate and take years to make simple changes that will help us reach people and share God’s message, Jesus’ message of love, equality and justice.

Like MLK Jr. – getting that message out means taking risks and stepping out of our comfort zones. Like MLK Jr. who had to clearly identify what he wanted, what his dream was in order to communicate it to the world ... we too need to figure out what our dream for this church is. When I asked this community about

the dreams for this church – a significant number said more children – if that is a priority dream – what is the plan to obtain that dream? Do we offer to children that they would want to participate in or that parents would want their children to participate in? Do we know how many children are in the community – are families moving in? What would be a plan to communicate this to the community and make that dream come true. What is the priority dream for this church and what is the plan to achieve it?

MLK had a dream, he had a plan and he had a message that spoke to millions of people. John the Baptist had a message that drew people to him and enabled him to point the way to Jesus, the Messiah. MLK Jr's dream of equality, justice, and love aligns perfectly with Jesus' dream for the world. Both fought hard for their dream – both even losing their lives to try to reach their dream.

I am not suggesting this church should go to that extreme. But we should be exploring and seeking to identify our dream and what it is we want to do in this community to serve God and to share Jesus' message of equality, justice and love.

Years ago, this church stood up for justice and took a difficult vote to become one of the early churches in NH to become Open and Affirming. Is this

still an important priority for the church? Is there a plan to get the message out to the community? Is there a plan to make that dream of justice for all people being welcome a reality, not just in the church but the community?

Like MLK Jr., and Jesus - I too have a dream of equality and justice for all. I have a dream that The Sanbornton Congregational Church United Church of Christ will be a part of making that dream come true. And I have a dream that one day the pews of this church will be filled with people who are seeking to draw closer to Jesus; people who are serving God in this community and beyond; and people who are living out Jesus' call to "come and see" – people who are set free, and liberated from their sin, serving God in this place and around the world. May it be so!

Amen