

“God Has a Dream”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
January 14, 2024 - Second Sunday after Epiphany

[1 Samuel 3:1-20; John 1:43-51](#)

I had a dream the other night. As I dreamed, I heard a voice calling me by name, “Ken, Ken, wake up!” At first, I didn’t quite wake up, but, in something of a middle-of-the-night stupor, continued to hear the voice calling. “Ken, wake up. Does that sound like water dripping?” the sweet voice of my wife Christine asked as I still resisted waking, but was alert enough to hear the sound. I dreamed that it was the pipes of our heating system ticking away, as they often do on a chilly night, but the reality was more nightmarish than my dream. There was indeed water dripping from the ceiling and onto our bedroom floor. Now both fully awake, we put a bucket on the floor to catch the cascading drips and went up into the attic space above to find the spots where water was coming in to seal those as best we could while placing additional buckets there to catch the water as it came inside. Fortunately, we’re dry now, and our roofer will be coming out this week to identify and hopefully fix the problem, so we hope that our leaky roof nightmare will not be repeated and we can get back to dreaming about better things at night.

Dreaming about better things is always good, especially when going through hard times when life does not match up with what we hope it would be, when the difficulties we face are more than just annoying drips, but seem like an unwelcome, mighty, destructive deluge, forcing its way into our lives, intent on sweeping us away. We face drips, downpours, and deluges, as all the people of our world and the planet itself do, and we pray for God to give us spiritual vision and hearing, to help us live through these times when it’s dark and rainy, to give us hope in hard times. We are grateful today that we have a dream-casting, ever-speaking God, who intercedes to help us.

Our first scripture lesson this morning from 1 Samuel tells us the story of how God interceded in our world by speaking to young Samuel at night as he dreamed. At a time when “the Lord’s word was rare...and visions weren’t widespread” (1 Sam 3:1), and even the sight of God’s prophet Eli was growing dim, God spoke, and young Samuel listened. God cast a vision, and Samuel caught a glimpse of it. God

had a dream of something better for the people of Israel than for them to be led by the visionless prophet and priest Eli, who had allowed his corrupt children to take the best of the food that was given to God in sacrifice, consuming it all themselves instead of using it to worship God and to feed the poor and hungry, and so God called out to Samuel.

And Samuel responded, first by listening to God, and then by boldly acting, proclaiming the message he had been given, which was not a pleasant message that would have been easy to give, but a message of judgment that would have been exceedingly difficult to offer, for he spoke God's words to Israel's prophet and priest -- and his own mentor -- Eli telling him that he and his household's time of holding and abusing power over God's people was coming to an end, which it did as Samuel began to serve as Israel's spiritual guide and God continued to cast dreams to Samuel and to speak words of life to the people through him.

We are gathered here today as a group of followers of Jesus Christ, another prophet who caught God's dream and spoke God's words to the people. We join with billions of others in our world today in following Jesus, and we do so as part of a greater band of followers who have lived before us, beginning with the first disciples, like those named in our gospel lesson -- Philip, Andrew, Peter, Nathaniel -- who were the first to recognize in Jesus that he was not only the son of Joseph of Nazareth, but who was the living Dream and Word of God. Then and now, to listen to his words is to hear God's message; to catch a glimpse of his vision is to behold God's dream for the world.

This weekend we remember and celebrate the life of a fellow follower of Jesus who payed attention to his words and caught his dream. On this Martin Luther King Day weekend, we consider again MLK's dream of a world in which all people are dignified equally, in which from heaven rolls down for all people justice like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, and we remember his example of prophetically speaking about this dream, given to him by God, to the mighty to challenge them and to the lowly to lift them up. Though he was branded by many as a dangerous extremist, Martin Luther King was in many ways just echoing the dangerous and extreme, life-giving message of God given by Jesus and Samuel and the other prophets to the mighty in their midst. King's call

for justice followed their calls for justice. His dream was in many ways their dream as well.

And this dream of God of a more-just world is one that God still gives to us today. We are called to catch that dream. We are called to pay attention to the words of our still-speaking God when they come to us. And we are called to act upon what we see and hear, following in the way of Jesus, Samuel, and Martin in acting boldly to share God's message and in pushing the world to becoming more like the world God imagines, a world in which all people enjoy justice and peace. May we all do this today in our own little corners of the world by what we say, do, and give, and may the whole world be blessed through us. Amen.