

Isaiah 49:1-7 □ 1 The Rev'd Dr Anita Louise Schell-Lambert

Psalm 40:1-12 Sunday, January 16, 2011

Corinthians 1:1-9 □ Epiphany 2 A RCL

John 1:29-42 Emmanuel Church, Newport, RI

□ The 10 am was a sermon delivered primarily to the younger children in the congregation and did not have a script

“Without a dream the people perish”

The celebration of Epiphany originated in the Eastern Church during the third century and celebrated the manifestation of God in Christ to all people. Like the Magi, we who follow Christ are bearers of the light. That is one reason that the season of Epiphany – now brightened by the Light of Christ spreading in the world – is typically a season for outreach. It is also the season when we celebrate one known for his outreach, Martin Luther King Jr.

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning “manifestation.” In ancient times, the term referred to an official visit by a royal person to his or her realm, a public showing of the king or queen to the people. Since Epiphany is celebrated on January 5, it is sometimes called Twelfth Night because it is twelve days after Christmas. Traditionally, this celebration ends the Christmas season.

Stories of about the Epiphany tell of a star guiding travelers from the east. In the retelling of these stories over the centuries, the travelers have become three in number and have been given a variety of names: wise men, magi, astrologers, and kings. Their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh represent products of the East. The truth of the story in all its variations remains important for all of us: In Jesus, God reveals the plan of salvation for all people.

Traditionally, people blessed their homes on this day. During the Middle Ages, people performed plays about the visit of the Magi. In some countries, people baked cakes with a bean inside. Whoever received the bean became king for the day. From our baptism we are all called to follow our star, Jesus. We can become an epiphany for others so that together we can grow and honor Jesus as our King and Savior.

As part of our observance of Epiphany and in recognition of the national observance, today we celebrate the life and work of Martin Luther King, 1929—1968, an African American Baptist minister and the main leader of the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1950's and 1960's. King had a magnificent speaking ability, which enabled him to effectively express the demands of African Americans for social justice. King's eloquent pleas won the support of millions of people – blacks and whites – and made him internationally famous. He won the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize for leading nonviolent civil rights demonstrations. There are numerous events in Newport dedicated to this day of service. In the spirit of outreach and service the parish office WILL be open in honor of Martin Luther King Day, Monday, January 17.

Visions and dreams are part of our lives as people of faith. To receive a message in a dream was not something to put aside as frivolous. A dream, whether it be Joseph's 7 fat cows and 7 skinny cow dreams or the prophet Isaiah's dream of mountains being made low or Joseph's dream to flee to Egypt with Mary and baby Jesus, dreams are understood in the Bible as critical messages from God and never to be avoided or taken lightly. Dreams show the abundance of God's love and the possibility of our world being changed, if we have courage to follow the dream.

Dreams may have to be put on hold, "deferred," in the words of African American poet Langston Hughes, but dreams will never "go away," and why would we even want them to? Dreams often

spur us on, to never give up, to keep working towards justice for all people, even when it would be easier to just shut down and take care of our own creature comforts.

We have many examples of women and men in both the Scriptures and in our common life as Americans who show us that dreams keep us going, for without dreams we will die.

On the eve of the celebration of Martin Luther King Jr., American civil rights leader and martyr, and just two years after the first African American president, we see how dreams really can come true, but we must work to make them happen, and trust that God is with us every step of the way. And when the way is long and weary, as it surely was for the first disciples following Jesus, and as we know it was for Martin Luther King Jr. in his work for justice for all Americans, we must never lose our will or way. We must never lose our resolve in striving for justice for all people.

“The fierce urgency of now” was a phrase coined by Martin Luther King in addressing his concern about the Vietnam War, that the time to end the war had come. I resonate with the phrase as it speaks to when dreams can no longer be deferred. The time comes when we must take leaps – leaps of faith in saying, “the time has come; we are ready to make a difference NOW – let’s go!” COME AND SEE! and then get going. As people of faith this time will come to all of us, if we trust enough in God and are not afraid. Fear will always immobilize us in our decisions. Jesus tells the disciples, “Do not be afraid.” From today’s Gospel,

In the very famous “I Have a Dream” speech of Martin Luther King Jr., recalled so often this weekend and on the eve of Tuesday’s inauguration, given on a sweltering day in August in Washington DC, eyes darting heavenward, and putting aside his prepared notes, Martin Luther King cried out, “Let America be America again/Let it be the dream it used to be.” And then he really began to preach...

“Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends...

And 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.

I have a dream today!...

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”.....

And then he went on to proclaim, “Let freedom ring...

“Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestant and Catholic, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”

Martin Luther Jr. went beyond the dream of an American dream to God’s dream!!! This is what the kingdom of God will look like, he said that afternoon: white people and black people from Georgia sitting at table together and being one family.

That is God's abundant dream of a world transformed by love, when we are always asking what we can do for the other person in need, when your health and wholeness is more important than my own, and when we, in the life work that Jesus taught all his disciples, (that includes us) beginning with those first 12, we preach in his name and heal the sick, with no outcasts and no qualifications about who we care for. All are God's children – when that day truly comes, when that dream of health and wholeness comes truly for all of God's children, then we will all be free.

That is the ultimate dream for the world this Martin Luther King weekend. That dream can no longer be deferred. Without that dream of freedom for all, we too will perish. "Without a dream, the people perish." May we continue to dream those dreams and act to make them so – in our lifetime. AMEN.