

January 17th, 2021 • 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany • Online Worship

“Dare to Dream: A New Dream for A New Day”

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris



John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Today’s worship comes on the eve of the Martin Luther King Holiday, the 26th anniversary of the day of service that celebrates Dr. King’s life and legacy. Did you know that MLK Day is the only federal holiday designated as a national day of service to encourage all Americans to volunteer to improve their communities?

On this day, our Gospel reading brings a story of the call of the first disciples. We’ll hear the more familiar version of the call of the disciples from Mark’s Gospel next week. Both versions invite us each to pause and listen for how God is calling us in these days into love and service in the example of Christ Jesus. Especially this year, especially now, when we’re rocked by the coronavirus and rocked by violence in our nation’s Capitol, I think it’s a good day to rest a moment in the spirit of God, of Jesus, of Philip and Nathanael, of Martin Luther King, and dare to dream a new dream.

Dream a new dream...here’s what I mean. When God sent Jesus to live with us, to be one of us, when God sent Jesus as a baby born in nowhere to nobody parents without even a roof over their heads, I think God was dreaming. God was dreaming again of the promised kingdom of love and righteousness and peace. Right then when darkness and fear covered the land, right then in the midst of the nightmare that was the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, in that terrible time, God dreamed the ancient dream anew. Of a promised land flowing with milk and honey, a land where everyone lived under their own vine and fig tree in peace and unafraid, a land where the lowly were lifted up and the poor were set free.

God dreamed the dream anew in the person of Jesus and sent him to us to bring life and hope and to be the Light of the world.

Jesus dreamed the dream into his own time. He decided, today’s text tells us, he decided to go to Galilee. Along the way, he found Philip and said “follow me.” Then Philip found Nathanael and told him they’d found the one Moses and the prophets had written about. “Come and see” for yourself Philip says. Nathanael asks Jesus: “Why me?” Jesus answers: “because ‘I saw you under the fig tree.’” Now that’s Bible code language. The fig tree symbolized the great abundance of the Promised Land. Jesus was saying in effect: I see you to be one who will work to bring the dream to life for all God’s children. Peace and plenty for all.

If you think about it, this is quite an astonishingly unlikely way to put this dream in place, isn’t it? A bunch of ordinary guys, Philip, Nathanael and the others. Well, they think they’re ordinary, until Jesus calls them into something bigger, something better, a new dream of hope and purpose. “You will see greater things than these,” Jesus promises.

Many, many years later, in another place, another time, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamed the dream anew. With great courage, he shared it with our nation and with the world:

“I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream.”

“Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.”

“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.”

“Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.”

“The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.”

“We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead.”

God dreamed the dream anew. Jesus dreamed the dream in his time. The eyes of Philip, Nathanael and the others were opened, and they, too, shared the dream, embodying it in their lives, in their love and service. Martin Luther King dreamed the dream and his words continue to inspire us to greater depths of commitment and conviction.

A line from the ethical teachings of the Jewish rabbinic tradition speaks to us now as we listen, in our time, for God calling us by name, inviting us to live into the dream: “It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it, either.”

Let us listen and strain to hear God’s call on our lives in these days—what act of service? What word of love? What gesture of compassion? What witness to the dream?

Let us dare to dream, beyond the challenges, the frustrations, the obstacles of the moment...let us dream for a new day to begin. And when Jesus invites us to join in, let us heed the call.