

Yr. C, Easter 5
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Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1479 Words

Lessons: Acts 11:1-18
Psalm 148
Revelation 21:1-6
John 13:31-35

The other night I woke from a dream because it was a little unsettling. I dreamed I was in a house—it was not *my* house, but it was a comfortable place. It was not extravagant, but it was nice and clean. It was a place you could feel at home. And I did.

One of my frustrations is that I usually don't remember my dreams. Scientists say that we *all* have dreams all the time, but some of us just don't remember them. I'm one of those people. I wish I could remember more dreams. I wish I could recall more clearly the details of the dreams I *do* remember.

Dreams can be consequential. Just read the Bible and you'll see. In fact, this morning we heard of a dream St. Peter had. St. Peter's dream changed the entire course of Christian history. If St. Peter had not dreamed this dream, then Gentiles like us would not be following Jesus today. Without St. Peter's dream, the followers of Jesus would have remained a small group of circumcised men and Jewish women living on the margins of the synagogues around Judea and Galilee.

We can be thankful that St. Peter dreamed, and remembered, and acted on it.

One thing I noticed in the reading from Acts this morning is that the very first thing which happened to St. Peter *after his dream* is that he was criticized by his fellow, circumcised believers. St. Peter's friends were like you and me. They did not like change any more than we do. Once we find what is comfortable and secure, we want *that*. Don't bother us with other ideas, plans, and certainly not dreams. If we want change, we will ask for it. Let's just leave 'well enough' alone.

The week before last I had the opportunity to attend CREDO. This is an invitational conference available to Episcopal clergy every ten or twelve years. CREDO enables ordained leaders to rest, reflect, pray, and—yes—even dream a little. CREDO is where I dreamed about the comfortable house which I had to myself.

The goal of CREDO is for clergy to pray and dream *enough* to remember their core values. As a result, every priest is able to write or revise a rule of life—a specific, tangible set of practices which ensure that our ministries and our lives remain in alignment with our values.

In my dream I began to walk around the comfortable house. I guess I wanted to see what it looked like, I don't remember for sure. What I do recall is discovering some stairs, which I ascended, and then a large room which—to my surprise—was filled with people I did not know. Not only did I not know these strangers, I had not realized there were other people in the comfortable house with me.

I think this is when I woke up. I don't have any recollection of entering that room to introduce myself to the strangers, nor do I recall slipping back downstairs where I had been comfortable. I think this is where I was unsettled just enough to wake up...in my guest room...at the conference center.

St. Peter described *his* dream like this: "There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven,...and it came *close to me*." Peter told his friends that he refused to do what the Lord told him to do because it seemed *profane*, unclean, and against the traditional rules they had grown up with.

But that *unsettling Voice* from heaven said, "What God has made clean, you must *not call profane*." In that moment, St. Peter's understanding of God's grace grew immeasurably. In that moment, Peter's vision of God's creation, God's will, and God's invitation grew immeasurably.

It sounds as if *this is the moment* St. Peter became unsettled enough to wake up. And *right there*, standing in front of St. Peter were three strangers—they were unclean men...uncircumcised men. They clearly did *not belong* in the same house with Peter—or so he thought, rather reflexively and out of habit.

It is so hard to push back against the habits of our thinking which feel comfortable to us. It is so hard to push back against the reflexes in our thinking which help us feel secure.

Everything in Peter's waking mind and body pushed back against his awkward, uncomfortable situation. We can be thankful that the grace of God's Spirit enabled St. Peter to dream, and remember, and act on it.

"It was the *Spirit*," Peter explained to his friends. It was the Spirit's (fault), insisting that Peter stop making distinctions between 'them' and 'us.'

We can be thankful that the grace of God's Spirit enabled St. Peter to dream, and remember, and act on it, because that was the day the doors of the Church were opened to you and me. Technically, the day that the doors of salvation were flung wide open to everybody was the day of the resurrection.

However, God has this funny habit of letting *real people*—like you and me and Peter—make decisions as leaders in the Church. And so the day that the doors of the Church were '*practically* opened' to every living soul was the day that St. Peter dreamed, and remembered, and acted on it.

What dreams will you dream for the glory of God? What dreams will you remember for the glory of God? What actions will you take for the glory of God?

What vision of all-inclusive praise will inspire *you* as it did the Psalmist?

"Sun and moon and shining stars, praise the Lord!"

"Fire and hail, snow and fog, and tempestuous wind, praise the Lord!"

"All you sea monsters and wild beasts, creeping bugs and winged birds, praise the Lord!"

"Young men and women—old and young *together*, praise the Lord!"

Don't you see—no-thing and no one is left out of this chorus? "What God has made clean, you must *not call profane*."

This is the Good News of our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to Acts *and* according to Psalm 148. It is the same 'Good News-dream' that John the Divine dreamed in the Revelation we heard this morning—"A new heaven and a new earth...and the holy city, beautiful as a bride. A loud, (reassuring) voice that God's home is among mortals...sinners...*real people*. God will dwell with them (and us—because *there is no 'us and them'* in Peter's dream or in the Psalmist's dream or in the Revelation dream.)

And that brings us to the Last Supper—the best earthly picture of what God's glorious love looks like. It is such an important picture that John's Gospel devotes five chapters to this holy occasion which we celebrate every week. It is *the* pivotal moment in John's Gospel,

when the One who *is* the bread that came down from heaven...

the One who *is* the water of life for the unworthy Samaritans (and everyone else)...

the One who is the Light of *the world*, not just our favored place in it...

the One who is the Way and Truth and Life of God's love fleshed out for *all to see*...

the One who is the Good Shepherd, even for those who do not belong to this fold...

that One said this: "Love one another...just like I have loved you." This is how all people will know you are *my* disciples (and not someone else's).

That kind of love begins like a dream which comes close to us...a dream that maybe even unsettles us. The love of Christ *is* like a dream to be remembered and acted upon. By remembering, we invite the Holy Spirit to breathe in us. By acting out the dream, we invite the Holy Spirit to do a *new thing with us*, just as the Holy Spirit did with St. Peter.

I woke from my unsettling dream two weeks ago, not knowing what to think...until I read these dreams and visions appointed for today:

- The dream of Peter which *practically* opened the Church to everyone.
- The vision of the Psalmist which left out practically no one or no thing in the chorus that praises God.
- The Revelation to John which promised a new heaven and a new earth from the God who is making *all things new*.

Don't you see how the Holy Scriptures can inspire us to dream and remember and act on it?

For heaven's sake, don't be afraid to wake up to God's vision—which is always bigger and bolder than our own vision. Don't be afraid to sing to the Lord a new song—which is always broader and deeper than our own songs. Don't be afraid to dream and remember and act upon it...for this is how we follow in Christ's steps—the way of love—that leads to eternal life.

Amen.