

**Yr. B, Easter 6**  
**May 9, 2021**  
**Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**1494 Words**

**Lessons: Acts 10:44-48**  
**Psalm 98**  
**1<sup>st</sup> John 5:1-6**  
**John 15:9-17**

You know all this started with a dream, right? It's a little surprising the dreamer was *not* one of the twelve disciples. In fact, the dreamer was not even a *regular* follower of Jesus...not even a Jew. The dreamer was a foreigner, a fighter at that. Actually, he was a commander of fighters. You know, the soldiers who first *tortured* and then *killed* our beloved Jesus. *That guy* had a dream.

Cornelius dreamed of an angel of the Lord, telling him where to find Simon Peter. It turns out that our own St. Peter had left Jerusalem. He was hanging out at a seaside home down on the coast of the Mediterranean. Now, that is my kind of discipleship!

When is the last time *you* had a dream which inspired you to do something new? When is the last time an angel—a messenger of some sort—called you by name and challenged you to change in some way? I want you to think about this today.

I want you to dream about flipping this script we have been living...languishing, treading water in place, just trying to get through our days. It's time to dream about flourishing again. It's time to sing to the Lord a new song!

I do *not* mean you should be careless with your health or the health of other people. I do *not* mean you should be disrespectful toward those who want to *or need to* keep wearing masks. I am also not speaking literally about singing. I'm talking about living with more openness toward the love and joy of God.

I was *in a dream* last weekend. I had the privilege of serving as a spiritual director for some amazing teenagers...six of them from our own parish...two more of our own who drove in from college to show their support for friends and family. Laura Lipscomb and I were among the adults who were along for the ride, as our own Caroline Griffin led this spiritual retreat for our diocese.

Happening Weekend #84. I am so proud of our youth leaders; it is hard to find words to express it. All I can say is that it is *like a dream* to spend time with young people who are opening themselves to a deep, abundant, and joyful life with God and one another.

Cornelius did what the angel told him to do. He sent several men to go find Simon Peter and invite him to open his mind to a bold new idea. At lunchtime the next day, St. Peter was soaking up the Mediterranean sun on the roof of the house where he was staying in Joppa (again, my kind of discipleship!)

Anyway, the men sent by Cornelius had not even arrived when Peter fell into a dream. I want you to notice how the surprising *and* Holy Spirit of God works...one dream at a time...seemingly disconnected, but really one great orchestra of God's eternal, loving, and joyful purpose!

I awoke early that Saturday morning, before the birds began singing as a chorus. The air was very crisp and cool. I was glad to have warm blankets. I love the quiet promise of a new morning. It is summed up nicely in the Collect for Grace we say at Morning Prayer: "Lord, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in *all we do*, direct us to the fulfilling of *your* purpose..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 100.

Are you open to receiving direction...from God's unpredictable and Holy Spirit? Are you willing to dream a little about a deeper, more abundant, and joyful life with God and other people? Are you ready to cooperate in fulfilling God's eternal, loving purpose...and begin singing to the Lord a new song?

Hungry St. Peter dreamed of a sheet being lowered from heaven—filled with animals, reptiles, and birds. And, lo, a voice said, "Eat up!"

Peter, the good Jew, said, "No way, Lord! I've *never* eaten anything unclean." God was not impressed...with Peter's religious perfection. The Holy Spirit of God just wanted Peter to open his mind to a new way of seeing goodness. The Spirit was calling Peter to sing to the Lord a *new song*.

I loved those warm blankets, but I also love coffee; and it was available...one hundred yards from my bed, over in the dining hall. So, I tossed on my clothes and stepped out of my cabin.

Wow! One of the Gravatt lakes was right before my eyes. The dark, glassy surface of the foreground was crowned by the brightest, sharpest golden reflection imaginable across that lake's horizon...and top to bottom, left to right, a breathtaking amount of morning mist was rising quickly up into the perfectly blue sky.

It was like a dream. "Morning has broken, like the first morning..."<sup>2</sup> proclaims the hymn. "Praise with elation, praise every morning, God's re-creation of the new day!"<sup>3</sup> Dear people, it's time to dream a little, and begin singing to the Lord a new song!

St. Peter changed his mind about something really important in his faith life. He welcomed new ideas he never could have dreamt of thinking. And he fully welcomed people he never could have dreamt of welcoming. Peter completely reconsidered what *and who* is clean. Peter listened to God's Holy Spirit and decided to eliminate 'unclean' as an adjective to describe *anything or anybody* whom God has created. What would happen if we did that?!

The coffee was calling my name. Having breathed in the beauty of the morning light and mist on the lake, I headed to the dining hall. Standing there beside the coffee pots was the Venerable Fred Byrd, archdeacon of our diocese for three decades. Father Byrd has been retired for quite a while, but not really. He volunteers to serve young people at spiritual retreats and summer camps, doing whatever it takes to help out. He works in the kitchen. He makes the coffee. He shares stories of grace that young people *and people like me* need to hear.

Many years ago, he helped me navigate through the discernment process for ordained ministry—all the roadblocks and stumbling blocks along the way. That Saturday morning it was like a dream, sharing coffee together.

I learned how Fred spent this past isolated year reading through his old newsletter articles and then seeking out the people mentioned in those pages. Some had died, and received a prayer of thanksgiving for what had been shared. Many are still living and received a prayer in the form of a phone call or a greeting card. Even in isolation, Fred found a way to sing to the Lord a *new song*.

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<sup>2</sup> Eleanor Farjeon, "Morning has broken" The Hymnal 1982, #8, verse 1.

<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Farjeon, "Morning has broken" The Hymnal 1982, #8, verse 3.

St. Peter began to share his eloquent Easter sermon—the one I paraphrased on Easter morning a few weeks ago. He began *boldly* with this statement which you and I still find hard to believe: “God shows no partiality...(none).” St. Peter did not even get to finish his sermon. As we heard this morning, our patron saint was interrupted...yet again...by God’s unforeseen and Holy Spirit!

So, he stopped preaching and asked a question to which he already knew the answer. “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people?” Thus began the *new song* which makes it possible for gentiles like you and me to be considered worthy enough to become Christians.

Sunday morning at Happening # 84, we all gathered in the outdoor chapel for Caroline to lead us in Morning Prayer. Up walks Father Byrd, wearing a t-shirt that read, “Happening #1.” He was there when it all began, decades ago. And he’s *still* singing to the Lord a new song!

It is a tremendous privilege to be considered worthy to follow Jesus Christ. So, what are you dreaming of doing with this great privilege? What kind of deep, abundant, and joyful life with God and with other people will you embark upon right now...this week...this year?

Of course, we face physical limitations, but we have no spiritual limitations...because God shows no partiality. And God’s persistent and Holy Spirit is still calling us every morning to a more open, generous, and loving life with Christ...and with our neighbors. You don’t *have to* live that life...you *get to live that life*.

I believe this is what Jesus meant when he said, “I do not call you servants...I call you friends...You did not choose me. I chose you...And I (have) appointed you to (get out there in the world) and bear fruit, fruit that will last...(fruit that ripens when you love one another as I’ve loved you.) And, by the way, Jesus added, “I’m telling you all these things so that my joy may be in you...completely.”

Dear people, morning has broken. It is a new day. It’s time to dream a little, and sing to the Lord a new song!

Amen.