

Pentecost 7 July 19, 2020 Proper 11

With the news of the virus outbreaks in different parts of the country, in Florida and Arizona, through some parts of the Midwest and Texas, I got to thinking about the differences between the states. I was thinking about how different Vermont is from Texas, the Green Mountains and rolling hills as almost the opposite landscape from the long, dusty plains of Texas, stretching all the way to the horizon. And thinking about this I was reminded of a joke Leo Martineau recently told me. It seems that there was a rancher from Texas who came to visit here and struck up a conversation with a Vermont farmer. The Texan said that he owned 50,000 acres to graze his cattle on. The Vermont farmer said he had 50 acres to raise the milk cows on. The Texan was quite surprised, and he told the Vermonter that some days he'd set off to cross his land in the truck and by lunch time he had only gotten halfway across. The Vermonter took that in for a few seconds and then said, "Yeah, I had a truck like that."

Prayer: Most merciful God, as you gracefully give us your word today, may our hearts and souls be open to this hope and may it take root in our lives. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend.
Amen.

In thinking about some of these differences and how it influences our humor, I remembered an early book by the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. The title of the book is *Jokes and Their Relation to the*

Unconscious, and in this book Freud makes the case that jokes express the wishes and desires of our unconscious mind, in much the same way as dreams can also reveal these deep thoughts that are hidden from us in the shadows of the unconscious mind. I have to admit that when I read Freud's book on jokes years ago in college, I was very disappointed because the jokes he tells are so bad! They are really lame. But regardless, Freud's work is mostly knowing the deepest thoughts we have, and how those thoughts reveal who we are. It was in Freud's work few years earlier, his most famous book, The Interpretation of Dreams, that he made the case for an unconscious mind that projects our desires and wishes into our lives, but that for the most part we remain unaware of the unconscious mind's power to direct our thoughts. Freud's great discovery is the dreams were one way in which these unconscious and unspoken wishes become known to us. Found myself thinking about this while I was reflecting on the lesson from Genesis appointed for this morning: Jacob's dream of the ladder to heaven, the dream of the angels, going up and down, but above all, the the affirmation of God's blessing upon him, the gift of land and the offspring, and most importantly, the promise of God's presence with hm to the end.

This dream is powerful: the image of Jacob's ladder has inspired Jewish and Christian believers for centuries. This is the first dream recorded in the Bible, and it sets the stage, if you will, for others, dreams

of Jacob's son Joseph, which tell of his future fortune and position, and dreams to a new Joseph, betrothed to Mary in Matthew's Gospel, and in a dream he is warned of the harm Herod seeks to inflict on Jesus for threatening the royal rule. Some of the prophets share their dreams as well, so throughout the Biblical record, we hear of these dreams as the people of Israel and our early Christian ancestors recall their dreams. Ultimately, it is Jacob's dream that believing God favors him and will provide from the depth of God's loving kindness, Jacob seeks a wife and begins the journey that will lead him to prosperity and a life full of family. But it is this dream, a vision of how the world should be and a vision that gives him the promise of God's blessing and God's continual care for him, that stirs Jacob to action and that sets him off on the course of his life.

This week in our nation we lost two strong voices for the dream of racial reconciliation. The Rev. C. T. Vivian, who as a young man launched the first successful campaign to integrate a cafeteria lunch counter in Illinois in 1947 and then later went on to work as a trusted aide for Dr. Martin Luther King at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, died this past week. I met Dr. Vivian with a group of pastors when he came to New York City about 20 years ago at the Riverside Church. He was a soft spoken man who really wanted to encourage us to keep working for full rights for all in ur society. He was especially interested in actions to integrate schools in New York City which had become more and more

segregated over the years. He believed that it was very important to work with young people and to overcome racial prejudice at an early age by making sure children of different races could learn and work together. Just a few hours after the news of his death came the news that Congressman John Lewis died after his struggle with pancreatic cancer. John Lewis was a towering figure in the Civil Rights movement, the son of a sharecropper in Alabama who as a teenager wrote to Dr. King expressing his commitment to join the movement for racial justice. He worked with Dr. Jim Lawson and Rev. Vivian in Nashville to end segregation, help to direct the Freedom Riders throughout the South, became the first director of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and in August, 1963, he was the youngest person to speak at the March on Washington on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. His death means that all those who spoke on that hot August day in the nations capitol have now all gone on to glory, but the hope spoken by all, and best articulated by Dr, King in his resounding, “I Have a Dream” speech, continues to live in our nation. All too often, that dream Dr. King presented, has seemed to be a nightmare, as the continued racist policies of our nation’s past have risen up to keep old injustices in place and have ended in terrible violence visited upon the African American community. Unfortunately, we have seen in this pandemic the racial disparities in our health care system have resulted in death rates for minority communities far in excess of the white

community. And now, the racial unrest unleashed by the killing of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis has set forth an unprecedented call for racial justice in our land. But that dream still lives on, Dr. King's words and the hard work and actions of leaders like C.T. Vivian and John Lewis promise that the course of that dream may some day soon be a reality for our children and grandchildren. It will not be easy, but in probably his most memorable saying, John Lewis reflected in his life that he had made "good trouble," and he urged young people to continue to make "good trouble" until the dream of freedom was made into reality.

In the midst of the time we now find ourselves living through, with great losses in all that we knew just a few short months ago: first and perhaps foremost, being able to gather together, to share and laugh together, to gather around the Altar to be fed in the presence of the Risen Christ, but also the loss of leadership in our land, the loss of certainty and now the loss of any clear vision of the future. And certainly, as we see the terrible loss of life, a daily death toll rising and a sense that we still have not seen the worst of what is yet to come, not to mention the severe economic devastation and the prospect of rising homelessness, and even the specter of hunger and famine throughout the world, all these factors are weighing down on us in a way they never have before. This loss of any vision for the future, this loss of a dream for our land and our lives might be the most severe and damaging loss we face. But today, as we look at

the dream of our ancestor Jacob, as we recall the dream Dr. King articulated that motivated the actions and lives of leaders like C. T. Vivian and John Lewis, I believe there is a lesson here for us: like Freud understood, dreams are based on those longings and desires that exist deep within us. In the depth of our souls, the yearning for God's love, the deep need for God's presence with us continues to roil. Jacob's dream is for us testimony, testimony of God's promise to be present in our lives, present even in the midst of of dangerous and difficult times.

The Psalmist, of course, is aware of God's presence, a presence that fills the Psalmist's life, that no matter where, God is present, so that the darkness is no longer dark, for darkness and light are both alike to God. The Psalmist can exclaim that God's hand will lead and God's right hand will hold fast. And the Apostle Paul echoes this same sentiment, that the Spirit of God has freed us and therefore we need fear no longer, for God bears us up as the children of God, and God is working to bring forth a new creation, to bring forth God's loving purpose in our world bringing God's reign of justice and love. And this, this Paul asserts, this is our hope, the birth of the dream of God's loving kingdom come to us. The hope we do not yet see, but a saving hope that we await in faith and with patience, yes as difficult as it is, with patience to be born in our lives and in the world.

In a moment, in our prayers, we will bring our concerns before God, but as we will pray also, we know God in all the divine compassion, God knows what we need before we ask, and indeed God knows what we need even if we are not aware of our own needs, but God in God's compassion and in God's mercy brings this hope into our lives. This is the faith we are called to live with, a faith we are called to share and a faith we are called to put into action, to stir up some "good trouble" when needed as John Lewis would have it, action to show God's love to our neighbors, to seek compassion and justice for the least of these and to become a part of the dream we dream, to find the vision for our future, knowing that God's grace is always present with us and for us, present to bring a new world to birth and a hope for us to now live for. Thanks be to God for this hope in our lives, for the divine compassion to reach out to others and to give us vision for the days yet to come. Amen.