

7 Easter Year C May 25, 2025

Remembering God's Dreams

Is anyone here good at remembering their dreams? Do you ever write them down or tell them to others?

I love exploring my dreams. And in my family we like to tell each other our weird, scary or detailed dreams and try to figure out what they mean. Dreams are like puzzles that help us understand who we are, our hidden-most selves, our deepest needs.

People have long believed that God spoke to them in dreams. I think that too. But when it comes to my dreams, God does not speak as clearly to me as he did to Peter and Paul and others of his followers.

The years right after Jesus died on the cross and rose again, and then ascended into heaven, were really confusing for his followers. They were trying to understand who they were now after having known and loved Jesus. Who were they now that their teacher had risen from the dead and was with God? And what did God want them to do with themselves?

In those first years without Jesus among them, people began to have really crazy dreams. Peter had them. Paul had them. Other followers did as well. Those detailed dreams sometimes told them to go meet people in other cities, or to change old behaviors, or to believe in Jesus.

Why were these dreams so intense? Why did so many people have them? Why do we still recount them today?

Will I wonder if the followers of Jesus in those first years after Jesus left them were having God's dreams. God's dream is for all people is to have life with God, and have it fully, to know the love of God completely and to be able to love others with that love. That was the Good News that Jesus came to share, and that his followers shared after he was gone – they wanted people to know that there was a loving God who dreamed about them. God's dream might show up while they were sleeping, or in visions while they were awake, or in the meals they ate together, or in the memories of Jesus that they shared. God's dream was a Word of love that was impossible to keep silent or hold back.

The people back then didn't have cell phones or email or texts to get the word out in the blink of an eye about Jesus and his role in God's dream. So I think God made up the difference. What couldn't travel by word of mouth, or by boat, or by letter, traveled even faster by vision and dream.

In today's story from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul has a dream that a man is inviting him to go and preach in Macedonia, which was in Greece about 150 miles from the place he was staying in what is now Turkey. Now Paul was no stranger to visions and dreams – he had first met Jesus in a blinding vision after all, and Paul had been going on long missionary journeys for a while. So he and his fellow disciples took that dream at face value, and they headed over to Macedonia. God's dream was pushy.

The Bible doesn't tell us if Paul ever met that man from Macedonia. But he did meet a woman named Lydia who became one of the leaders of the early church. She didn't need to have a dream or a vision. Paul's Words convinced her that Jesus and his gospel of love were an answer to the prayers that she and her fellow women were already praying. She in turn had her whole household baptized. Which meant her family and the people who worked for her. People who sold purple cloth were rich and influential. God's dream found a very good home in Lydia and her family.

Our second story is a dreamlike vision reported by a Christian named John of Patmos decades after Peter and Paul were preaching. Dream language was handy to use at the time because those early Christians were being punished by the Roman Emperor. It was sort of like code to share the Good News of Jesus in a way that dangerous people wouldn't recognize. Those images are really helpful even today. I especially love the image of a River full of the water of life and of a tree growing on either side of it, with leaves for the healing of the nations. I would like a leaf of healing for my nation right now, because I dream of its repair. A tree full of healing is a beautiful dream.

In those early years, after Jesus had left his followers, one way that his friends made sense out of their dreams and out of their questions was to remember what Jesus had told them when he was with them. They thought long and hard about what he told them, and they told those stories over and over to each other. Some of those stories eventually became the ones we tell at church on Sunday, our Gospels. Jesus' followers remembered and remembered and remembered. I think it's safe to say that they didn't understand what they remembered for quite a long time. But eventually they did – with the help of the Holy Spirit.

That's why even though it's after Easter, we remember what Jesus told his followers at the Last Supper on the night before he died. In John's Gospel, Jesus gave them a lot of instructions on what to do after he rose from the dead and then went up to be with God in heaven. It took them a long time to make sense of what he said – even though the most important instruction was for them to love one another, which should have been easy. But it's possible it wasn't.

When we don't understand something we've experienced or learned – like our dreams, or Jesus's parables, or our lives – it's ok to remember them until we do understand them. Sometimes meanings change over time. Remembering allows us to revisit the past, pay attention to it, learn from it.

Jesus' followers not only remembered what he said on the night before he died, but they also remembered what he did – which was share a meal with them. Sometimes doing things helps us to remember things. Like, sometimes if I forget something, I have to go back to the room where it happened, or where I had the thought in order to remember it. Does anybody do that?

So, we share the meal that Jesus gave us – the Eucharist – every Sunday as a way to remember. We might not always understand it, but remembering it, doing it all the time helps it to sit within us, until we do understand. Jesus planted so many seeds about who he was and who they were, for his followers to discover as those seeds rooted and grew. They were watered with the Holy Spirit, and with the followers own lives, and with their own experiences and stories. Sometimes it took years, even centuries

of remembering until we could understand better what Jesus was saying to us. And our understanding has grown and deepened over time, the way that plants do – like that Tree of Life.

One of those seeds that Jesus planted that night before he died, was Peace. He said to his disciples “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

The world Jesus lived in was not a peaceful place. Jesus told his disciples this on the night before he was killed on the cross. The Peace of Rome was called the Pax Romana – but it was not the kind of peace that comes from people loving one another. It was the kind of peace that happened when people were so beaten down or bullied or wounded that they didn’t fight back. “They make a desert and call it peace,” the historian Tacitus said of the Roman empire. Even to this day in our society, peace is often something that happens between wars.

But Jesus’ peace, God’s peace, is not the peace between the wars, it is peace in the middle of war, or violence or bullying or shame. It’s peace that talks back to war and says you are unjust and unfair. Jesus’ peace is the peace that says deep down, God’s love is bigger than this conflict and God’s presence is more enduring. Another world is possible, another way. That is good to remember on Memorial Day.

The Holy Spirit watered these seeds of peace that Jesus sowed among his followers so that they could become courage, which His followers have always needed a lot of.

We remember Christ’s peace when we offer the sign of peace to one another – another way we remember things by doing them. At St Peter’s this might be our favorite part of the liturgy. But when we share peace in this way, when we wish one another peace, we are sharing with one another something that the wider world doesn’t understand. Christ’s peace is the calm that accompanies Christ’s love, it’s the belief that insists that Jesus will be there for us when the wider world says he won’t.

This is God’s dream for us – that we will know God’s love so deeply that it will bring peace to our lives and the lives of those we touch. And that is a dream worth remembering over and over again.

Amen.