

Pentecost Sunday
June 9, 2019
The Rev. Emily Richards

God's Dream

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember you have within you the strength, patience and passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” These words were spoken by Harriet Tubman, known as the Moses of her people because she fought tirelessly for the freedom of slaves in her own day. She personally helped over a thousand slaves to escape to the North. Tubman is considered among that great company of dreamers in our Christian faith, who have insisted that God can make possible what others might not be able to envision. Archbishop Desmond Tutu counted as one of those dreamers today, “writes, “God’s dream is that you, and I, and all of us will realize that we’re family; that we’re made for togetherness, for goodness, and for compassion. In God’s family, there are no outsiders, no enemies. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Buddhist all belong. When we start to live as brothers and sisters and to recognize our interdependence, we become fully human.” All of us have a part to play in the emergence of God's hopes and dreams, Tutu declares. We come here on this Pentecost Sunday, all dressed in our red to be reinvigorated by what the Holy Spirit did among those first followers of Jesus and what this same Spirit is doing among us as her fresh winds of promise blow through our lives, inviting us to become a bunch of dreamers, too.

Yesterday some of us had the great privilege of celebrating with Laura at her ordination to the diaconate. In the back of the service leaflet a brief bio about each of the nine ordinands was offered. I love what was said in Laura’s, presumably what she wrote: “Ordination was not even a blip on her radar. Although God’s vision for her life was larger than her own, she was led to this day, a place beyond imagining and unexpected blessing.” Now I suspect that if the men and women who were waiting in that upper room on this very day had written bios about themselves, they may have described the moment like Laura described her call to the ordination. It was not even a blip on their radar. They were fishermen and tax collectors and physicians. They were hard-working mothers and fathers, ordinary folk, friends of a rabbi who walked out of a tomb and returned among them as they broke bread together. And they found themselves once again wondering what in the world they were doing up there in that room when the wind and flame of the Spirit’s power rushed in and drove them out beyond the fragile safety of their walls to places of unexpected blessing and purpose. She drove them out

into the city streets below to witness with their own eyes and ears the divine dream manifested in the beautiful faces and languages of God's people.

We can't read this story without thinking of the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis when all the peoples of the earth are scattered and their languages are confused resulting in separation from one another like never before. On Pentecost the Spirit undoes what happened at the Tower of Babel as she reunites the broken and divided beloved community of humankind. When we hear about the crowd's ability to understand the disciples' preaching in their own languages, we experience the way that God has always heard us and how we are meant to hear each other. "In the mystery of fire and wind, language and understanding, the timid disciples are converted to the work that God has always been doing: to gather and unite, to forgive and raise up, to love as God loves," writes the Rev. Shelley D. McDade. In this Spirit-filled moment the disciples become not only inheritors of the dream, but its first ambassadors.

The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman was an early civil rights leader whose own ideas influenced the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was also noted for helping to found the first multicultural, multi-racial church in the country. Dr. Thurman grew up in Jim Crow South but raised his family in Washington D.C. In his autobiography, *With Head and Heart*, Thurman recalls a day he took his young daughters to his hometown: "On one of our visits to Daytona Beach I was eager to show my daughters some of my early haunts. We sauntered down the long street from the church to the riverfront. This had been the path of the procession to the baptismal ceremony in the Halifax River... At length we passed the playground of one of the white public schools. As soon as Olive and Anne saw the swings, they jumped for joy. 'Look, Daddy, let's go over and swing!' This was the inescapable moment of truth that every black parent in America must face sooner or later. What do you say to your child at the critical moment of primary encounter? 'You can't swing in those swings.' 'Why, Daddy?' 'When we get home and have some cold lemonade I will tell you.'

When we had had our lemonade, Anne pressed for the answer, 'We're home now, Daddy. Tell us.' I said, 'It is against the law for us to use those swings, even though it is a public school. Only white children can play there. But it takes the state legislature, the courts, the sheriffs and policemen, the white churches, the mayors, the banks and businesses, and the majority of white people in the state of Florida—it takes all these to keep two little black girls from swinging in those swings. That is how important you are! Never forget, the estimate of your own importance and self-worth can be judged by how much power people are willing to use to keep you in the place they have assigned to you. You are two very important little girls'."

Even in our most discouraging moments, even when we wonder whether our society is any better off now than when Dr. Thurman's little girls couldn't play on the public school's swings, we must cling to the promise that God's dream cannot be extinguished. We owe it to Olive and Anne Thurman. We owe it to all our brown, black and white children and grandchildren who deserve to grow up in a world where one's self-worth is not measured based on the color of skin, or one's sexual orientation or physical ability or economic status, citizenship or faith tradition. The winds of the Spirit may not blow the same as they did all those centuries ago, but they still blow our way. They still surprise us. They push us out beyond the safety of our own manufactured walls and towers to take up the mantle of Harriet Tubman, Desmond Tutu and Howard Thurman and become fired up followers of Jesus, bent on manifesting God's vision for the world, a vision in which we're all family; made for togetherness, for goodness and for compassion.

Let us pray in the words of Walter Brueggemann:

*Powerful and Pentecostal God,
you infuse us with your Spirit,
urging us to leave our safe and comfortable places for the world beyond us.
May the gift of your presence continue to be a wild and unpredictable force,
Blowing the world out of nothing into abundance,
Blowing the church out of despair into new life,
Blowing to make things new that never were.
So blow this day, untamable wind,
Blow here and there, terrifying power,
Blow even upon us, enlivening Spirit,
Rush us beyond ourselves,
Rush us beyond our hopes,
Rush us beyond our fears, until we enact your newness in the world. Amen.**

**This prayer is an adaptation from Walter Brueggemann's prayer on the Holy Spirit in [Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth](#) and from the [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) created by Vanderbilt's Divinity School*