

Advent 2 Sunday December 4 2022

Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12

When I was a child, the time before Christmas was a time to dream. I remember lying on the floor underneath our 70's artificial tree and looking up through the branches and colored lights. Dreaming of Christmas break from school, of toys, or adventures I would go on with them. Dreaming as I looked at (and sometimes played with) the pieces of the Nativity Scene on the piano top in our Living Room. Dreaming of the trip of the wise men and wondering about the life of the shepherds.

It is a human thing to dream. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on a late August day in 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, shared a dream that he had. A dream that seemed inconceivable to a nation still deeply segregated into white and black. A dream where sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners will be able to literally sit together at the same table. Where children are judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. Where those with dark skin do not have to use separate bathrooms, water fountains, live separate lives. Where they did not have to fear being beaten or killed because they dared exercise their right to vote, to be educated, to live. A dream that would overturn the standing order of things, especially in the American South, and bring freedom and justice for all people equally.

An inconceivable dream to those who heard it.

It's a human thing to dream, but God, too, has a dream. One that the prophet Isaiah lays before us in our reading today. A dream that is inconceivable to us, but not to God, for with God all things are possible.

It is a dream of the kingdom of heaven, where the inconceivable is the natural order of things. The way God created them to be.

Isaiah tells us that God dreams of a world where the wolf and the lamb live together. Where the leopard lies down with the kid. Where predators and prey live peaceably with one another. Where no one tries to hurt another or destroy them.

God dreams of a world where out of what seems dead, comes life... true life... even out of a stump. Cut low to the ground. Seemingly lifeless. Its once great majesty forgotten.

For Isaiah tells us that God will dream forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. A new branch from the seemingly dead tree of the great king David. Hope for a return to what was the best of times for the Jewish people. A hope placed before them in the midst of despair, as the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrian Empire and the Southern Kingdom of Judah was threatened. The land promised to their ancestor Abraham as a perpetual holding seemingly slipping through their fingers.

A dream of a new ruler for the people of Israel, the people of the world. One in whom the Spirit of the Lord has come to dwell- a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. A spirit of joy in God's presence. The very blessing I will pray over Jonah

Morris today at his baptism. The same blessing prayed over each of us washed in these waters.

This ruler will judge not on the surface of things (sight and hearing) but with righteousness. Looking into who a person is. A ruler whose option is for the poor and meek. Whose power lies in what is right, not in arms. Whose power is not this (clenched fist) but this (open hand).

Inconceivable.

God dreams of a world filled with true justice and righteousness. Not our human approximations. A world where those who are hungry have enough to eat. Where there is no more cancer. Where the stain of hatred is washed clean from human hearts. Where bigotry and jealousy are no more. Where fear and its cousin anger are no more. Where greed and lust for power and money are no more. Where God's truth and justice prevail for everyone.

God dreams of a world where those created in God's image do not shoot one another, stab one another, punch one another, despise one another, but rather embrace one another in love as those created in the very image of God.

The dreams of God are inconceivable to us, but not for God, for God all things are possible.

God has a dream- one that has come walking into our waking not as a nightmare but as a hope fulfilled. A dream come to us in Jesus- Emmanuel- God with us. A dream embodied in this man from Galilee who speaks and shatters the illusions of the wicked. Who pokes holes in our elaborate charades about who we are, about the systems we create, about the righteousness of our cause. Who shows us the

truth of things. A man who is clothed in righteousness and faithfulness to God and who embodies God's dream. Who speaks of this dream as a reality and who embodies the truth of it in our lives.

But this dream of God comes with destruction. Destruction of the forces, the systems, the ways of being that exist now, that do not make for justice and righteousness. That are the anti-dream of God.

It is like we talked about on Wednesday, when we sing O Come, O Come Emmanuel, we are praying for Holy Disruption. As we learned in our journey through the Gospel of Luke last year and hear Mary sing about her son Jesus in the Magnificat, he has come to overturn the way of this world. The kingdom he brings is one that will cast the mighty down from their thrones and uplift the humble of heart. The hungry will be fed with good things and the wealthy will have no part.

Inconceivable.

This is the root of the warning John the Baptist gives as he takes up the mantle of Isaiah and proclaims again God's dream for the world. Announces the coming of this dream. A dream that will cost us something. A warning that our participation in this dream of God's kingdom means our cleansing will be more than just the washing of baptism, but also perhaps being thrown into the air to have all the worthless stuff of our lives blown away like so much chaff. Perhaps being put through the proverbial flames of the refiner's fire that burns off all the dross, the useless stuff, until what is left is the purity of who God has called and created us to be.

It will cost us something, this dream of God's peaceable kingdom. It will cost our delusions about our abilities to live life well on our own. Our comfort that we have built into the systems around us, especially us middle class Mid-Western folk. That tends to isolate us from the harsher realities of this life. It will make us uncomfortable at the beginning, as the illusions of this world are held up against God's dream reality.

But this dream of God's which seems so inconceivable to us. That is where I want to live. A reality that is so much better than all the saccharine worlds we create in Hallmark movies, or the soft glow of sentimentality of Thomas Kinkaid paintings. Things that feel good but are not real.

As difficult as it might be, I want to live in that dream of God's. Where there are not people dying in war even as we sit here. Where there are no children going hungry tonight. Where there are no more people without shelter, without food, without love. Where we live not in fear and anger towards one another- but with love and compassion.

John the Baptist has come to announce to us that in Jesus we have the fulfillment of God's dream through Isaiah. That in Jesus, God with us, we have the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven. A reign Jesus has inaugurated and will bring to completion when he comes again. A reign, a dream we pray every week, will come. Now, even a little bit, become a reality through us and our lives. A reign that we pray, even a little bit, will catch us in the strong wind of the Holy Spirit and toss our lives about- shake loose the things that seem so important to us but are just chaff. Useless stuff. A breeze that blows it away so there is room for us to see clearly God's dream and live into that reality.

Dreams are wondrous and dangerous things for us humans. They can make us complacent- become an escape from what is, a shelter from reality, a buffer. They can also inspire us. Literally, breathe life into us. Stir us to action to make that dream a reality. To strive.

I invite you to dream this Advent, not the small dreams we humans have, but to join the dreaming of God. A dream where we strive not for wealth and power- but for peace and justice. A dream where we work for the good of all people, but especially for those who do not have the basics for life. A dream of a world filled with joy, peace, and love for you, and your children, and your neighbor, and all this world that God has created.

Let us dream this Advent God's dream become reality in Jesus- Emmanuel- God with us.