

## ***Dreamers Wanted!***

### *Genesis 3:1-28 (common English Bible)*

*Jacob lived in the land of Canaan where his father was an immigrant. This is the account of Jacob's descendants. Joseph was 17 years old and tended the flock with his brothers. While he was helping the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, Joseph told their father unflattering things about them. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob had made for him a many-colored robe. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him and couldn't even talk nicely to him.*

*Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers, which made them hate him even more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had. When we were binding stalks of grain in the field, my stalk got up and stood upright, while your stalks gathered around it and bowed down to my stalk."*

*His brothers said to him, "Will you really be our king and rule over us?" So they hated him even more because of the dreams he told them.*

*Then Joseph had another dream and described it to his brothers: "I've just dreamed again, and this time the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."*

*When he described it to his father and brothers, his father scolded him and said to him, "What kind of dreams have you dreamed? Am I and your mother and your brothers supposed to come and bow down to the ground in front of you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father took careful note of the matter.*

*Joseph's brothers went to tend their father's flocks near Shechem. Israel said to Joseph, "Aren't your brothers tending the sheep near Shechem? Come, I'll send you to them."*

*And he said, "I'm ready."*

*Jacob said to him, "Go! Find out how your brothers are and how the flock is, and report back to me."*

*Joseph's brothers saw him in the distance before he got close to them, and they plotted to kill him. The brothers said to each other, "Here comes the big dreamer. Come on now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns, and we'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams!"*

*When Reuben heard what they said, he saved him from them, telling them, "Let's not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Don't spill his blood! Throw him into this desert cistern, but don't lay a hand on him." He intended to save Joseph from them and take him back to his father.*

*When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped off Joseph's many-colored robe, took him, and threw him into the cistern, an empty cistern with no water in it. When they sat down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with camels carrying sweet resin, medicinal resin, and fragrant resin on their way down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers,*

*“What do we gain if we kill our brother and hide his blood? Come on, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites. Let’s not harm him because he’s our brother; he’s family.” His brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt.*

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The podium in front of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, was set up for one of the biggest and most challenging speeches of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s career. Multitudes traveled to our nation’s capital to join the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The march was co-organized by the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The eyes of the nation were on Martin as the keynote speaker. Many considered him the spiritual leader of the American civil rights movement.

Martin prepared his text carefully. He asked for suggestions from trusted advisors. He went through several handwritten drafts. It was unusual because he often spoke extemporaneously with a few jotted notes. Originally his title was “Normalcy, Never Again” - but after he finished multiple edits, the manuscript he clutched in his hand was not what he wanted it to be.

The most famous line from the speech - “I have a dream” - wasn’t in the draft manuscript. That ringing refrain had been a feature of several speeches he delivered in other places - in Detroit two months earlier and at Booker T. Washington High School in Rocky Mount, NC, a year previous.

The beloved gospel singer Mahalia Jackson was sitting behind Martin as he struggled to find words to connect to the audience. “Tell them about the dream, Martin!” she said to him. He heard her, and talked about the dream.

Martin’s riff on the phrase, “I have a dream,” is as inspiring today as it was 62 years ago. And the most famous of his improvised lines remains: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

If you have any doubt this was a deeply religious address - a sermon to the nation - or that the Civil Rights movement was a deeply Christian movement - then listen again to what else Martin said that day: “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

Words of the prophet Isaiah, quoted by the most significant prophet of our time. Martin continued, “This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.”

100 scholars of public addresses ranked Martin’s “I Have a Dream” speech as the most significant speech of the 20th century. Author Jon Meacham wrote in Time magazine, “With a

single phrase, Martin Luther King Jr. joined Jefferson and Lincoln in the ranks of men who've shaped modern America."

Martin dreamed of better country for all God's children, but others found his words threatening. An FBI agent named William Sullivan, head of the Bureau's domestic spying operations, wrote in a memo to Director J. Edgar Hoover: "In the light of King's powerful demagogic speech yesterday he stands head and shoulders above all other Negro leaders put together when it comes to influencing great masses of Negroes. We must mark him now, if we have not done so before, as the most dangerous Negro of the future in this Nation from the standpoint of communism, the Negro and national security."

Martin Luther King, Jr was a dreamer, and, like many dreamers, things did not go well for him. Then, as now, dreamers make the powers that be - powers that fear change - deeply uncomfortable. Visionary leaders do not hesitate to dream of a better tomorrow for all God's children. And those who fear change do desperate things to try to bury such dreams.

It's nothing new. We see it in acted out in our story from Genesis. Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel - the one with the coat of many colors - has several dreams during his life and interprets others' dreams.

His early dreams foreshadow a time when his family will bow down to him and serve him. It's a dream he foolishly shares with his twelve brothers. They respond: "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." (Genesis 37:20)

Joseph's brothers think better of their words. They decide not to kill him, but they do throw him down a cistern, then sell him into slavery. They cover up their heinous deed by staining his multi-colored coat with animal blood. Joseph's heartbroken parents believe the lie that a wild beast killed him.

Joseph's story continues in Genesis and reaches its climax in chapter 50. Through a series of amazing adventures, Joseph ends up imprisoned in Egypt. While he is in jail, his dreams portend a future of both plenty and famine in the land. Eventually, Joseph is released from prison and elevated to an administrative position high in the government. He is soon running the entire country as Pharaoh's chief of staff.

In a time of terrible famine, the sons of Jacob come and grovel before this Egyptian bureaucrat. They beg for food so they won't starve, and fulfill the very dream they'd found offensive years earlier. Only then does this mighty Egyptian official reveal his true identity. He is their brother Joseph, who has every right to exact revenge. But his heart is full of forgiveness for these brothers who wronged him. Joseph was not a complainer or blamer; he was a dreamer.

Jim Wallis, American theologian and founder of the Sojourners Community in Washington DC, says something's missing from Martin's famous, "I Have a Dream" speech. It's the phrase, "I have a complaint." Wallis points out "there was much to complain about for black Americans, and there's much to complain about today for many in this nation. But King taught us that our

complaints or critiques, even our dissent, will never be the foundation of social movements that change the world – but dreams always will. Just saying what is wrong will never be enough to change the world. You have to lift up a vision of what is right.”

Wallis’ words ring true today as Martin’s did in 1963. In our communities, in our nation, in our world, we need to dream, and dream big. We need to teach our children and grandchildren to dream of justice for all people.

We need more than the American Dream of individual achievement and billions who promise benefits for all while consolidating power for their oligarchy. We need God’s dream for the human race, a dream of a world made new through the grace and resurrection power of Jesus Christ. A dream expressed by the apostle Paul who writes to the Corinthians: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.”

Yes, we need more dreamers. We don’t need more complainers and blamers. We have plenty and their toxicity drowns us in bitter swill. We’ve seen it acted out in the partisan politics of our nation for years and in the recent presidential election. Everyone is engaged in a game of blame and complain. They point fingers at each other and make vague promises to make things better. It’s easy to point out what’s wrong and rally your troops. The problem is that the kind of unity is built on negative energy, and has no staying power.

To move beyond this situation, we need dreamers, visionaries who focus not on how bad things are, but on how good things can be. We need dreamers who focus not on what they want, but on what’s good for everyone. We need dreamers who can outline concrete ways, small, incremental steps that can be taken, to achieve worthy goals. This is true for our church and community, this nation and our world. One determined, persistent dreamer who shares a positive vision of what can be, sows seeds of joyous enthusiasm that transform and remake our lives.

One of our jobs in the church is to be dreamers. We’ve been given the vision of God’s intent for our world, a purpose that God started at creation and continued by Jesus inaugurating a new kin-dom. God sent the Holy Spirit to launch the Church that we might continue to dream and work for this vision of a new world of justice and peace for all people.

This is our calling as Christians. It is our mission as the church. If we don’t do our job, someone will fill the void with a vision that is unworthy, a vision that does not treat all people with dignity and respect, a vision that points people not to God’s kin-dom, but towards their own small, self-centered kingdoms.

Christ calls us to a bigger dream beyond any one of us. God calls us to dream and work for God’s kin-dom to come on earth – to come in our lives, in our work, in our families, in this church, this nation, this world. Yes, it means change. Yes, it means we’ll be uncomfortable. But only God’s dream is worthy of our lives. So, go out and be God’s dreamers!

January 19, 2025 (MLK Weekend)  
Rev. David Whiteley