

Year B – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany      “God’s dream”

*“The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread” (1 Samuel 3:1)*

It seems to me that the word of the Lord is rare in these days, too. There are some who would claim otherwise – those who claim to hear from God all the time and know just what God wants. I confess that I’m suspicious of those claims. How are we to know if what they are hearing is from God or from their own egos?

So, has God given up on communicating with humanity or are we just not invested in listening?

*Life*, writes the British poet David Whyte in his poem *The Opening of Eyes*, “is no passing memory of what has been / nor the remaining pages in a great book / waiting to be read. / It is the opening of eyes long closed.” It’s paying attention to the God who creates, who cares, who calls and who speaks. And it’s responding with the little boy Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”<sup>1</sup>

God does speak to us but we often fail to hear. And we fail to hear because we’re not really interested in listening. Listening to anything is hard work. It requires a real focus and desire to hear and understand – to be present to the one who is speaking. And listening does not always guarantee hearing. To hear what’s being said we have to take it in and process it, interpret what we’re hearing and then respond in a way that makes sense to what is being said. Listening is hard work! It requires desire – desire on our part to receive what might be offered.

One of the issues that the church faces is how to listen to what God is saying to us. We’re pretty good at putting together our own perspectives – even listening to each other and sharing our ideas of what the church can and should be but when do we ask the question – what is God saying to us? What does God want for this church? What is God’s dream for us? “*Speak Lord, for your servant is listening*”.

I’ve just given a book to the Vestry that we will be reading together over the next few months entitled *Leadership and Listening: Spiritual Foundations for Church Governance* by Donald Zimmer. I invite you to join us in reading it. It’s about leadership and spirituality – the struggles of leaders to deal with the business of the church and still keep the main thing the main thing. The main thing is that the church is God’s mission through Christ Jesus. The church comes from God. The church belongs to God. The church is destined for God. We are God’s missionaries and, in the midst of all of our planning and doing we need to have room for listening. We need to be able to say “*Speak Lord, for your servant is listening*” and actually do it.

The story of Samuel tells us one important way that God speaks to us. Throughout scripture there are stories of folks who hear from God in their dreams. Samuel’s dream wakes him up. And it takes a while for Eli to realize what’s happening but he’s well versed in speaking and listening to God so it finally occurs to him that Samuel is being paged. In the night, while we sleep, we are more open to the life of the Spirit that beckons us. I remember years ago, when I was discerning my call to serve as a priest that I found myself on the stairway at night, literally following Jesus, who, of course, disappeared when I woke up. But the message was clear.

When we wake in the night we are open to hearing or remembering what we heard in our dreams. Certainly if you keep waking up at night you should consider that God wants to speak to you – or already has in your dream. Or when you remember your dreams consider what God's invitation might be. I wonder what would happen if we started sharing our dreams? Could we listen for God's voice in the midst of them together?

Now if you come to me and say "I've had a message from God", I admit that I will view that somewhat skeptically. But I will listen. God's word is not absent today. But we may be so preoccupied that we don't hear it. On the other hand, if we listen deeply even in our hearts, we sometimes can hear the nudging that God is doing – to push us in the right direction. It might come with a fleeting thought, a sense that we should pay attention to something, a word from a stranger or even a friend – the words from a child.

Last Sunday at the House Church worship we looked at our baptismal promises and I encouraged those gathered to think of ways to really carry out the particular promises this year and I handed them out on cards. The young man who got "*seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself*" suggested that he needed to be nice to those he didn't like. Everyone gathered (especially the children) agreed that was hard to do and that he had spoken truth. Listen for those words from our children – they are for all of us! God speaks through them, too!

Tomorrow we honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And we all know that Martin, who was a faithful pastor who prayed and listened to God, had a dream. Remember some of the words that he once shared with us:

*Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.*

*And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.*

*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."*

*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

*I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*

*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.*

*I have a dream today!<sup>2</sup>*

Martin's dream came out of his prayer and listening to God and his own people.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu echoes Martin's speech when he says:

*"God says to you, 'I have a dream. Please help me to realize it.' It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts."*

God's dream, Archbishop Tutu explains, is a place where laughter, love, and peace reign and where we realize that we are all members of one family--God's family.<sup>3</sup>

God does speak today. Through those who take the time to pause and ask, *"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening?"*

What is God's dream for us? For you? For this church?

*"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening". Amen.*

Patricia Rome Robertson+  
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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Journey with Jesus, an online newsletter by Daniel Clendenin for Sunday, January 15

<sup>2</sup> From "I have a dream" delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. on August 28, 1963

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from "God has a Dream" webpage of Archbishop Desmond Tutu