

Revelation 21:10,22-22:5 Bill Uetricht 6 Easter 5.22.25

I wonder if you are as enamored, flummoxed, mystified by the dreams you have at night as I am. Sometimes when I wake up and still can remember my dream, I say to myself, “Where in the heck did that come from?” Dreams are amazing and sometimes bizarre.

The Bible is very interested in dreams and visions. We get two visions in our readings for today. The first is a nighttime dream, one that Paul had. The second from Revelation doesn't mention the timing for the vision. All we are told is that John, the revelator, was carried away in the Spirit to a great high mountain, from which he could see the holy city Jerusalem that was coming down out of heaven from God. Was this a nighttime dream or a daytime vision or a trance-like experience? We don't really know. All we know is that the author is being transported to another reality.

These particular dreams or visions aren't really that unique in the scriptures. Dreams and visions show up frequently. The Joseph of Genesis is an interpreter of dreams. Jacob has a dream of a stairway to heaven. King Solomon has a dream that causes him to choose wisdom as his primary pursuit. Joseph, the father of Jesus, has a dream that helps him make a decision regarding his future marriage to Mary. The magi have a dream that tells them to travel in a way that avoids Herod. Dreams and visions permeate the Bible.

Now, many of us after we have the strange dreams that we do, after we have gained consciousness, often say, “Wow! Sure glad that wasn't real.” The dream world, the vision world, is often thought to be an unreal world. But I wonder if that is an accurate reflection on dreams.

Psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung revealed to us that our dreams are often the work of the unconscious. Yes, Freud saw our dreams sometimes simply as the “residues” of the day, a reworking of

some of the little things that occurred in our lives. But often, he and Carl Jung were convinced, our dreams are a means by which we work out what is going on deep inside of us, realities that we often are not aware of. So, dreams, while perhaps not being historically real, are nonetheless, really real. They are sometimes more real than our conscious life, which too often can be a matter of the lies we tell ourselves.

Ancient people, Biblical writers, perceived dreams as being real. Because dreams are so odd and not a matter of our control, the ancients thought that dreams often were messages from God. Paul in our text from Acts today perceived his dream about a man from Macedonia begging him to come to Macedonia as a message from the Spirit of God. And being such a message, it needed to be responded to. So immediately, Paul got up and did as his dream told him. He left Asia and went to Greece. The Spirit was compelling him. For Paul, the dream was as real as real can be. The Spirit was taking him into a new territory. The church would be expanding. It would include all kinds of people, embracing a businesswoman, a dealer in expensive cloth, Lydia. The church was becoming a dynamic, growing movement, prompted by Paul's dream.

Now, I am well acquainted with the danger of taking too much stock in one's dreams, being familiar with people who have private experiences that they think everybody else should know and be led by. Sometimes cults are created by such experiences. The Spirit has told so and so to do thus and such. Yes, you need to be suspicious of such folks. They can do great harm. Some people's private spirit-experiences, personal dreams and visions can too often be nothing but their opinions writ large. But don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Don't forsake your own dreams and the people with dreams.

I really believe that to be especially important when it comes to the vision that the book of Revelation provides us today. The Spirit who is carrying away the author to a great high mountain is giving this author a vision, a dream of what I like to call “the final future,” the future that brings the end to all futures. It’s a wild dream. It’s a cosmic dream. It’s an unsettling dream.

The dream of the final future contains no temple. Ah, this bugs me. I work at the temple. My life is shaped by what happens at the temple and what flows from it. But in this dream, religion as a separate sphere in life is done away. “Imagine there is no religion.” Here is that kind of imagination.

Now, I must tell you. I think religion is quite important. And for me, the growing loss of religion’s impact upon our corner of the world is not necessarily good. We’re paying the price for some of that loss. But the visionary of Revelation is giving us a dream in which religion as one separate corner of the world gives way to God as all in all. In this vision, we don’t need a temple to remind us of God. God is everything. The city doesn’t even need a moon or sun for light because God is the light, and the lamp is the lamb, the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

What a massive vision, a vision that helps to see that in the end...God. Oh, lots of folks want to know if in the end there is going to be golden streets, country music, Amos my dog, baklava, or beets. Well, we know that the last in the list won’t be there, but frankly, the Bible isn’t interested in providing us a list about the end. It’s interested in proclaiming that the dream ends in God.

It is God on the throne that we see in this vision. Flowing from the throne is a river, the river of the water of life. The final future is connected to the beginning. There was a river in the Garden of Eden. The future is not disconnected from the past. God’s recreating work is not a matter of destroying all things but bringing all things together,

including the past, present, and the future. Run from the folks who give you a picture of the future as a matter of total destruction, the folks who want to convince you that what God wants to do is to tear everything apart in some battle they call Armageddon and save only the folks who raised their hands at the crusade or some other kind of worship experience.

The dream is of the water of life bringing nourishment to everything. "On either side of the river is the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, that is, throughout the year. And the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations." The word for healing there is the Greek word from which we get our word "therapy." The leaves being fed by the water of life are for the sake of the therapy of the nations, so that they might get better. The vision is of no more sick nations, no more nations dominated by injustice, power mongering, violence, war. No more bombings in Gaza. No more bombings in Ukraine. No more civil unrest in Sudan. No more neglect of the vulnerable, the refugees, the immigrants, the disabled. No more cynical and divisive politics. No more life defined simply by whoever has the most toys. No more global climate change. No more sick rivers, sick skies, disappearing animals. The earth has been made right. The nations and the land are healed.

Oh, that sounds so dreamy, so unrealistic, doesn't it? Dreams are so illusory, aren't they? Well, that is what some people conclude. They would ask us not to pay attention to the dreams, to the visions, because realism doesn't allow us to. Yes, it's true. The vision of Revelation hasn't come historically true. The nations, including our own, are quite sick. But what if the dream of Revelation, the dream, I believe, of God is, in the end, more real than the shallow, petty, violent, unjust reality that characterizes too much of our life together? What if war and injustice are a matter of trusting a lie about people and life? What if indeed all

human beings are created in the image and likeness of God? What if life is fundamentally a gift, and not a matter of achievement or accomplishment, not dependent upon who has the most toys or guns? What if life is a matter of sheer gratuity, an experience of wonder and fun? What if life belongs to the one who raised Jesus from the dead? What if in the end, God?!!

If in the end, *God*, the God who wouldn't put up with those cynical folks who tried to do away with life by crucifying it, then all bets are off. Then, we will do well to pay attention to the dreamers, to the visionaries, to the folks who hear the voice of God and experience the presence of Spirit, as that Spirit takes us not to the same old same old, but to the truly new, to a world shaped not by human ugliness and stinginess, but divine grace, love, and peace.