

Sermon for 30th August 2020 – Year A – Trinity 12 – Romans 12:9 – 21 and Matthew 16:21 – 28

I have a dream...

We all know these famous words of Martin Luther King Jr.

I have a dream...

I am not African-American, yet Luther King Jr's speech takes my breath away, moves me deeply and touches me profoundly. I dream of society where we all are 'just' people. I dream of life where I don't have to wonder whether I have been treated equally. I dream of a world which is a good and safe place for each and every one of us to live and use our God given gifts and skills for the common good of all.

Peter, like any good Jewish person at the time of Jesus, had a dream too. He dreamt about the long waited Messiah, the King of the Jews, the new King David, the one who would come and sort out all troubles once and for all.

Here is Jesus. A charismatic person, who clearly has God given gifts and skills of teaching and healing, he even performs miracles like feeding thousands of people and walking on the water. For Peter, and for others, who knew about Jesus and especially for those who were at the receiving end of Jesus' gift of healing, the dawn of something better was just around the corner. And so their hearts were singing, "I have a dream...."

Last Sunday we heard how Jesus asked his disciples what they thought about his identity. Peter, somehow miraculously, said

that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Although Jesus knew that Peter said so because it was given to him by his heavenly Father, it still made Jesus happy. He was happy that Peter was on his way to understanding of Jesus' real identity. Maybe that was the reason why Jesus said that Peter would be the man upon whom the God's community was to be build. Maybe, because of Peter's words, Jesus felt that it was the right time to tell his disciples a bit more about himself and his mission, as we heard this morning.

Now, that wasn't exactly what Peter and others had dreamt of. We can almost imagine Peter's thoughts: 'Wait a minute! What!?! You must be joking!! I know you are the Messiah – you said so yourself. What sort of justice you can bring to us by dying!?!' In his disbelief, Peter tells Jesus off. "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But to his shock Jesus in return calls Peter both 'Satan' and 'a stumbling block.'

A moment ago, Peter was so elated and happy. His dream was coming true, Jesus was the Messiah, the long-awaited King of the Jews. And now Jesus has dripped off all those dreams. What was there now for him and the others?

We, of course, know the rest of the story. Peter indeed, becomes a rock upon which the new community following Jesus and his teaching is build. But how did Peter managed to get there? I think the clue is in what Jesus also says in our Gospel passage today.

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

We know how Peter struggled to grow in his understanding.

But he did, when he denied Jesus three times on the night before Jesus' death. He did, when Jesus after his resurrection asked Peter three times if he loved him and then told him to tend his sheep. Bit by bit and through mistakes and hard work, Peter and others began to understand Jesus' real mission and the will of God.

Their experience taught them that the Way of Jesus wasn't easy. Everything they knew, their old way of life and dream of Messiah of their ancestors, was something they needed to give up and instead carry a new sort of cross as they emerged to Jerusalem and travelled beyond its walls, after Jesus death, resurrection and ascension. Yet, a new kind of the justice, mercy and love for all had been brought into the world by Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. It wasn't what they had dreamt of or hoped for but something far better.

I have a dream...

Friday marked the 57th anniversary of Luther King Jr's 'I have a Dream' – speech. It's clear that the ship turns slowly. The racial equality, economic equality, gender equality are still fought for. The peaceful protests and demand for justice still continues. Not only over the Atlantic but here too. And this pandemic has highlighted the inequalities of the society in our country and in the societies all around the world.

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Yes, we all have dreams. And those dreams may have become clearer during these past months of Covid-19 pandemic. Or they may have come crumbling down. But this isn't just about our individual dreams. No, the real question today is **'what my role is**

as a Christian', in this continuous need to bring justice, peace and equality into the world which God saw to be good at the creation.

Today as ever, we as Christians need to stand up against inequality of any kind. We are to proclaim through our actions, words and thoughts the unconditional love of God for this world. Just like Paul explains to the Romans, in his 'How to follow Jesus' guide: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head'. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (ERV).

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As Christians we are called to follow the example of Jesus so that there is real change in the world, through which the kingdom of God becomes more and more visible to all to see. In doing so, sure, it will be a heavy cross to carry but the end result will be amazing.

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Amen.