

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



June 16, 2024

DREAMS

they are too important for your skepticism

by Drew Downs

Describing the divine project in words and images is quite easy. Believing they can happen, however, is much harder.

We might fumble our words or seek to define them again in new ways. Or go looking for more information, more teaching, to help us make sense of it. To get better at embodying it. Doing it right. Just like the pious young man, we want to be right and do right and be confident of it all.

We show way too much skepticism toward our most precious dreams. And give way too much power to the voices (external and internal) who want us to never realize them. Who think we aren't good enough, too sinful, too weak, too anything at all.

Skepticism isn't inherently virtuous. Our common dream for a better world deserves way more faith than we give it. And far more joy in creating it.

ORDINARY TIME

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

The Dream of God

When we hear Jesus try to explain God's dream to his followers, it can help remind us that the words we use are always pregnant with possibility—and loaded with the baggage of experience.

Jesus's own descriptor, the Kingdom of God, is a reference to people living in a world full of kings. Even as their own king was the puppet of an emperor. An emperor who made the people treat him like a God. So Jesus used the language of emperor worship to turn it on its head: to show the people that their true devotion must go, not to this human construct, but to the divine.

This language doesn't resonate the same way, especially after kings and emperors twisted Jesus to support what he condemned. So we have sought other language to speak of God's place above the earthly constructs. I've landed on Dream of God myself, but there are others that work, too.

Dreams are positive, however. They reflect what Jesus describes as God's *desire* rather than what God condemns. So we need to include critique, too. Particularly one that fits for our moment. A good one might be The Economy of God. That God's way reigns, not nations, CEOs, or the invisible hand. We could try on the Democracy of God; or if you're feeling technical, the Republic of God.

The point is to name the ways our priorities get in the way of God's. And how we might order our society (not just ourselves!) in a way that lines up with God's priorities. Priorities of equality, wholeness, peace, justice, and joy.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 6B

June 16, 2024

Collect

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

Jesus offers two illustrations to help understand what the Kingdom of God is like. It helps for us to remember that. He isn't trying to explain a concept to his students like an algorithm in calculus class. He's trying to share God's vision for creation. It is a dream so vivid it feels real, so audacious some find it hard to believe, so true that we are afraid it would work.

We're familiar with the arrangement, certainly. Jesus is teaching in parables, stories and images. And we take these stories and compare them to the world around us. Seeds can be people and ministry and church and sometimes all of it at once. We embrace that creativity and flexibility just as much as we embrace a vision of understanding, of certainty and conviction.

But we do receive these parables in our context. And they arrive here to us with their own context. And it can be difficult to want to hear the greater message. Not just what the Dream of God is like, but that it is a thing we actually want to participate in.

I'm not trying to be dismissive! I just see us get focused on these teachings, their meanings, rules and expectations, being right, what our neighbors are thinking and doing...and I don't always see a lot of embracing the Dream of God.

There is a small distinction between trying to understand a concept and to participate in a thing. And it's one we often make as students. We might study a particular theologian, for instance. We read all of their work and try to understand everything they said and meant. To really get into their mind. And we might order our lives around rules we think they would want us to follow. This can help us live into the Dream, I suspect. And it can also be a way to never embody the work, seeing life as correct answers on tests rather than the experience of living it, for example.

God's dream can grow from almost nothing. That's a mighty big concept to order one's life around.

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