

Sermon for December 4 2016 – Second Sunday of Advent

“I Have a Dream!”

Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, our beloved Lord and Savior! Amen

Sometimes it's helpful to know that you're not alone...especially when it seems that the world is going to hell in a handbasket.

For many, that's precisely what it feels like in these days of hate crimes, global warming, white nationalism, religious fanaticism, political polarization, terrorist attacks and on-going warfare in the Middle East. It's downright depressing.

I'm guessing you'd agree that in the midst of our despondency, we long to hear a word of hope, a voice of reason, a glimmer of good cheer.

And so, on this Second Sunday of Advent, we are drawn to the dreams and visions of the prophets, both past and present. Let us listen to them speak this morning. May their hopes and expectations bring us peace and become our rallying cry for the days ahead.

“I have a dream,” says the prophet Isaiah. “I dream that a King will come to rule with righteousness and faithfulness...a King who will be filled with the Spirit of the Lord...a King who will usher in an age when the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the cow and the lion shall all lie down together in peace. I have this dream.”

“And I have a dream,” says the John the Baptizer. “I dream, in the wilderness, that together we might prepare the way of the Lord and make His way straight. I have a dream that we might all repent...that we might all turn back from our sinful pasts and recognize that the kingdom is at hand, here and now. I have a dream that all of God's people, baptized in Spirit and Fire, might bear fruit worthy of repentance and give honor in all they do to the coming One. This is my dream.”

“I have a dream,” says the apostle Paul. “I dream that Christians might discover hope in the midst of darkness...that we might live together in harmony, praising God with one voice...welcoming each other in Christian love. I have a dream that all people might be welcome in God's house...Gentile, Jew, foreigner and native born...that together we might sing praises to God and be filled with joy and peace. This is my dream.”

“I also have a dream,” says the Psalmist, “that the kings of our world might walk with God...bringing righteousness to all people, restoring justice for the poor, defending the needy, and rescuing those in peril. I have a dream that mercy and gentleness might fall everywhere like rain upon the mown field, like life-giving showers to the parched earth.”

“I have a dream as well,” says Christian activist Jim Wallis. “My dream is that all people...of whatever race, tribe, culture, class, nation, gender or sexual orientation...all people...will be seen and honored as children of God. I dream of a world with no outsiders at all because everyone will have been welcomed and treasured and loved. That is my dream.”

"I have a dream, too," says author Brian McLaren. "I dream that we Americans might become good and distinct people, the best possible version of ourselves, not merely fulfilling (and exploiting) some national myth of manifest destiny, but instead creating a national legacy for our children and grandchildren, a great nation among other great nations, through wisdom, justice, freedom, compassion and action. That is my dream."

"I also have a dream," says Lutheran historian Martin Marty. "My dream is that the Christian church might be led by clergy and laity who do not look back to the 'good old days'...a church which leads by pulling people out of selfish security...a church actively engaged in welfare and relief...a church where value is seen even in the lives of people who do not agree with them...a church that is faithful and intelligent in the face of public opposition...a church which stands over and against the state religion, privatized faith, and tribalist churches. This is my dream."

"I still have a dream," says Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior. "Despite deferred dreams of the past and blasted hopes, I still have a dream, because, you know, you can't give up in life. If you lose hope, somehow you lose that vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of all. And so today, I still have a dream...that one day men and women will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers and sisters. I still have a dream this morning that one day every Negro in this country, every colored person in the world, will be judged on basis of the content of his or her character rather than the color of his or her skin, and that every man and woman will respect the dignity and worth of human personality."

"Oh, yes, I still have a dream today that in all of our state houses and city halls men and women will be elected to go there who will do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with their God. I still have a dream that one day war will come to an end, that men and women will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, that nations will no longer rise up against nations, neither will they study war any more."

"I still have a dream today – and so should you - that one day every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill will be made low, the rough places will be made smooth and the crooked places straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. I still have a dream – and so should you - that with this faith we will be able to adjourn the councils of despair and bring new light into the dark chambers of pessimism. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when there will be peace on earth and good will among all people. It will be a glorious day, the morning stars will sing together and the people of God will shout for joy."

May this be our Advent dream...today, tomorrow and forevermore. Amen