

“Given As a Light to the Nations”
Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of
Decatur, Georgia
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Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 49:1-7

God has dreams for us.
God has dreams for the whole people of God
to embody loving kindness,
to practice deep spirituality,
and to establish justice for one and for
all.

“We bear the dreams of God in our daring
bodies.” (Brueggemann)

God has dreams for us that we mustn’t keep in.
These dreams are so life-giving and life-affirming
that it would be a crying shame to hide them
or cover up or deny them.

These dreams we bear are to shine forth as lights of hope.

*“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness shall not overcome it.”*

Bill Goodin tells a story of when he was night fishing with a
college buddy.
He and a psychology major were catfish fishing one night on
a lake in Oklahoma.
His friend asked,

“Bill, do you realize that 70% of the people in mental institutions

are there because they got some kind of religion?”

Just as quickly, Bill answered,

“Do you realize that 100% of the people in hell are there because they didn’t?”

Bill really felt good about his quick retort.

He leaned back and fairly gloated – and then knocked the lantern off the boat.

They watched their light sink like a rock.

Later Bill decided that the moral of the story was:

“Witnessing is great fun, but gloating seems to go better in darkness.”

(Goodin, *God Laughs, Too*, P. 96)

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine...”

One by one by one

people of faith have reached out
to touch and change the world around them.

One by one by one people of faith have dared to take risks,
to dream dreams planted within by the grace of God,
to share their faith in such a way

that their very living points to God
...and the world takes notice.

God has a dream for you, and you, and you.

The Holy Bible is the compilation of the stories of people who lived out God’s will.

God gave to the Prophet Isaiah a dream,

sending him forth as a light to the nations.

People asked Isaiah who he was, who he dared to be,

what authority he had to speak up so loudly and

forthrightly

for truth and unity, for the oppressed and the
cast aside?

Isaiah responded that the Lord said,

*“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the
preserved of Israel;*

*I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the
earth.”*

This is not Isaiah’s idea;

the only authority Isaiah brings to the conversation
is that this dream is not his idea.

Walter Brueggemann points out to us that

Isaiah speaks with authority because

*“...the initiative of the mission is with God, and
only with God.”*

This was God’s dream for Isaiah,

which would grow exponentially

as it was shared and became a living reality
in the community, in the city, in the
nation, in the world.

Folks stopped Isaiah and asked him his credentials, and he
said,

“God has given me to be as a light to the nations.”

This is what it means to be patriotic.

Biblical patriotism is linked with modeling God’s will.

Isaiah modeled God’s dream for him as best as he could
and guess what...the nations noticed.

He lived out his faith that God cared that he live faithfully,

that he raise up unity and restore relationships,

to build up and not destroy,

and, low and behold, the world took

notice.

This passage of scripture is Isaiah's testimony,
his elevator speech, his vocation, his creed, his legacy.

Everyone should have one, yes?

How about you?

What are God's dreams that you carry with you, in your
daring body,
in your deep and abiding faith, in your questions and
wonderings,
in your doubts and worries and fears and
hopes?

God has a dream for you to live out, live into, live through,
and then to share as a light to the nations, to your city,
to your community,
to the ones who know you
and to those who have yet
to make your blessed
acquaintance...

Model your very best and the world will take notice.

As you embody God's dreams for you, look for them in one
another.

Look for the very best in people.

Believe in God, and believe in your fellow brothers and
sisters,

trusting in and seeking out one another's potential.

God has dreams of unity that may be celebrated in the midst
of diversity.

This dream has been articulated for us
through many languages, arts, images, and people.

Consider how God's dreams took root and blossomed before
our very eyes
in the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1963, King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and
said,

*"I say to you today, my friends,
that 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 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 dream today!

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted,
every hill and mountain shall be made low,*

*the rough places shall be made plain,
and the crooked places will be made*

straight,

and the glory of the Lord shall be

revealed,

and all flesh shall see it

together.”

God has dreams that are alive and well today.
God dreams of people living in community,
affirming and sustaining one another
in a journey replete with loving kindness, deep
spirituality,
and justice for one and for all.

The dreams of God are no small thing,
easily dismissed, easily forgotten, easily set aside.
Far too quickly do we put bushels over bright lights;
far too casually do we dismiss dreams
as unrealistic, as a fantasy, as pie in the sky.
We fall into our own traps
whenever we attempt to limit the scope, range and
magnitude
of what God desires and anticipates;
we miss the forest for the trees
when we seek to manage and limit and box in
what God can and does create
through the Church of Jesus
Christ.

And then we wonder why life, or church, or relationships
are dull or routine or unimaginative...
You see, God's dreams initiate mission.
Mission is where the fun is; it's where the rubber hits
the road.

At 87, the philosopher George Herbert Planner
concluded a brief autobiographical statement with:
*“As I see these things rising behind me
they do not seem of my doing.
Some greater power than I has been using me as its
glad instrument.”*

Some greater power than you and me has dreams for us.
The mission of God is not our idea;
 it is not born of us,
 yet by the grace of God
 the divine dream must and shall emerge
 through us.

Some greater power than you and me has dreams for us.
Jesus Christ was and is given as a light to the nations.
Christ calls us forth to carry on the mighty works of God,
 one act of kindness at a time,
 one act of justice...,
 one act of compassion...,
 one act of hospitality at a
 time.

I charge you -- nay, we are charged by Christ! --
 we are charged and inspired by all those who have
gone on before us --
 the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist, our
Church School teachers,
 those who taught us to pray, those who cared
for us so much
 they shared with us the greatest gift of all,
Jesus Christ.

We are charged as the whole people of God
 gathered in this place and time
 to take on the conscience of the entire world.

We are not given a small thing to do;
 we are commissioned to be as a light to all the nations.

Oh, would that God asked us to accept a smaller assignment;
 would that God said to the church,

“Just take care of your own.”
*“Just hold tightly to your past without regard
to the future.”*
“Love only those who love you first.”
*“Be builders of self-esteem only, not builders of
a just society.”*
“Hakuna matata!”

Instead, the Church is called to a vaster appreciation of the human condition

and what it means to embody grace and embrace discipleship.

Will we choose to let out the dreams of God?

Do you dare to put your body and life on the line?

Do so, and you will live!

Do so, and you may risk all yet the gain is your soul!

Will Wilimon was the visiting speaker at the Lenten Sermon Series in Memphis.

He spoke at an Episcopal Church in the downtown area.

Afterward everyone was invited to stay and visit in the fellowship hall,

where soup and sandwiches would be served for a couple of dollars.

Will Wilimon and the priest of the Episcopal congregation went downstairs to the fellowship hall.

Wilimon looked around and saw people coming into the room

from other rooms in the church building;

they had been involved in a wide range

of programs and ministries there.

Some people were active in giving food and clothing to homeless families;

some were destitute;

some folks were walking in
after meeting with Narcotics
Anonymous

and Alcoholics Anonymous;
still others were coming in off the street
to visit and eat with their friends.

Everyone sat at tables and ate their soup and sandwiches
together.

Will Wilimon took this all in as he looked around.

He turned to the priest by his side and said, "*This is a good
idea you have here.*"

"*Oh, no,*" replied the priest, "*this isn't my idea. This is Jesus'
idea.*"

The Good News is that Jesus Christ dreams of giving us as a
light to the nations.

Let your little light shine, and you shall be filled with
*all the power of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*