

“Live the Dream”

Rev. David Gregory

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Pentecost 23



Readings

Psalm 126

from the New Revised Standard Version

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the desert.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Mark 10:46-52

from the New Revised Standard Version

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So, throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Whoever is doing the rain dance, we are certainly happy about it, but you might want to dial it back a little. We are deeply grateful, though. The parched ground is grateful. The plant life is grateful. The firefighters are grateful. The reservoirs are grateful. And I am grateful. The first sound of raindrops on my roof was something like a dream last Sunday. As we prepared for our Taize practice, I could literally smell the rain coming. Following so many dry months, my first reaction was that I was imagining it, but today I'm pretty sure I'm not.

We know that the drought is far from over. This is just a drop in the bucket, so to speak, and we must also consider the sum total of extreme weather patterns exacerbated by our ongoing climate crisis. We must still conserve water and extend our activism to support leadership that embraces science. We have daunting tasks ahead of us as individuals and as collectives. And yet . . . it feels really good to settle back and enjoy the moisture falling from the sky. It brings fresh meaning to ancient words, lyrics from a Hebrew song dating back three thousand years or so:

*The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the desert.*

This song speaks of a people disappointed, downtrodden, exploited, conquered, forced from their land, demonized as “other,” puppets in the hands of the powerful, not unlike the thousands of refugees who find their only hope in teeming at our own borders, risking their lives to make their way to a simple dream—to live in safety and have a chance to prosper enough to care for themselves and their families.

The ancient stories are not so far from our own, so we can easily understand the wonder, the disbelief, the bone-deep sense of relief when the refugees begin to see that their deliverance is at hand. Their rain is beginning to fall. They're finding their way home. That which is precious to them is no longer out of their grasp, but sitting before their very eyes.

*May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.*

The tyrants do not always win. Injustice does not always stand. Disinformation does not always go unrecognized for what it is. People are not always denied access to health care. The most vulnerable people in the world do not always suffer at the hands of despotic ego-driven maniacs. The rains eventually come, or as Jesus might have said it, “The realm of heaven is close at hand.” And what a balm it was to the souls of the people who followed and listened to him. It was a hopeful, dreamlike time so deep, so powerful, and so life-changing that we're still talking about it two thousand years later. And it's a message we need right now.

Let's talk about Facebook and our collective love/hate relationship with social media. Like an abusive lover we just can't seem to shake, whose algorithms slither around our consciousness to reassure us that we're being told the truth, Facebook constitutes a threat that we may have sensed all along, but haven't quite been able to describe. Enter the whistleblowers, our post-modern prophets, crying out in the wilderness, speaking truth to power, and shining the light of justice on the minds and motives of those who exploit us.

One of the more interesting things that Facebook does is to bring me daily "memories," showing me posts that I made nine years ago, or four years ago, or whatever. It becomes a catalogue of my sermonic voice, my earnestness and passion for things to turn out fine. Once in a while I find something that makes me go, "I can't believe I ever said that!" Old sermons that embarrass me can just be dragged and dropped into the trash folder, which can then be emptied. But Facebook will never let me forget what I have said. The whole point here is that I regularly come face to face with the times that I have been happy and hopeful, depressed and despairing, the times when I've had a great outlook for the future, and the times that I have simply felt unsafe. The first lesson for me is *maybe in the future, don't say so much*. The second lesson is that things are never as good or bad as they seem in the moment. They just simply *are*. And there are rhythms to the circumstances of life that could have us one moment thinking all is lost, and the next moment that we're about to reach Nirvana. The truth is that neither is true.

We've come to this earth to be co-creators with the divine. And we're co-creators 24/7/365. It's not something we turn on or off. We're always creating something, and we may think of it as good or ill, but it's just what we're creating. As transformational teacher Mary Morrissey likes to say, "You don't get to not create." So the point is to raise your mindful awareness about what it is you're creating and find a rhythm that has you moving toward the world that you would *rather* create, instead of the default mechanisms of this algorithm-driven life. When Jesus said to Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus answered, "Please let me see again." Notice that Jesus did not say, "OK, then, I'll heal you." He said, "Your faith has made you well." I think Jesus empowered him to know something incredible about himself, namely, that he could see. I will admit to being just naïve enough to think that Jesus might enable me to see some things as well.

For the last year and a half, I've been trying to make sense of the pandemic world, for myself and for those who hear my words. I've searched for context, for meaning, for hope and encouragement. I've sifted and sorted through my life and consciousness, finding the things that matter, discarding the things that don't. I've become more singularly focused, and I've come to realize that this is never a bad thing.

And about a year ago, someone shared with me the following piece by Sonya Renee Taylor, author of the New York Times bestseller entitled *Your Body Is Not An Apology*. This is not a quote from her book, but a blogpost in response to the pandemic, and it articulates for me today the sum total of what I'm trying to say.

We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. What we have been forced to leave behind we needed to leave behind. What is getting us through is what we will need to take forward, all the rest is up to us.

DREAM. While [you] have so much time. DREAM of the life you want. DREAM of the world you desire to exist in. Look for the places in your new dreams that have parts of the old world and remove them. What is the dream then? From there we can add to the collective weaving of whatever it is that is next. If we are gonna heal, let it be glorious.”

