

Dreaming Boldly

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What a weird and creepy week. Senate Republicans took their first major step toward repealing the Affordable Care Act. Just curious folks, but what is the role of government if not to care for its citizens? And then there was that incident on Thursday night, when a CSPAN live-feed of Rep. Maxine Waters talking about Russia, hacking, and Trump was interrupted by Kremlin-backed programming. I mean, what the hell was that?? And then there was Obama's farewell, which sounded hauntingly like his acceptance speech, reminding us for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, democracy is in our hands. Whoa, feels a bit like somebody dropped the ball, dudes – I'm just saying.

Look, I know it wasn't any of you and it sure wasn't me...or was it? Oh, we can blame the commies, or congress, and our neighbors, and even ourselves, but it won't do us any good. Rather today, on this Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday, we can simply conclude that it's been a weird and creepy week, in the middle of a very weird and creepy time.

Our responsibility as a prophetic church is not to blame and point fingers. Our responsibility is to see what is happening all around us, pay attention, interpret what we see, and have faith, that if we gather together and inspire one another we will have the power to transform our ways and the ways of society. That's our job as a prophetic church. I realize I'm dreaming here, and I am dreaming boldly. That we, here in this little church, can change society. Yet as a person of faith, I must have hope that we can indeed make a difference in this weird and creepy world. I must have hope or I will lose my nerve.

This morning as we ponder King's dream, and our responsibility as prophets in this weird and creepy time, we were treated not only to a piece of music by our own Michael Harris, but also to the prophetic lyrics of the poet, Langston Hughes. Hughes wrote of dreams often, and in many ways. He warned us about ignoring our dreams. He wrote:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Bad things happen when we lose hope and stuff our dreams into the back closet. Since I mention hope, let me remind you of the difference between optimism and hope. I want to be clear that I am faith-filled and hope-full. I am not an optimist. Optimism is getting up in the morning, putting on your fuzzy slippers, looking out the window, enjoying the sunshine that falls on sheep grazing safely in the pasture. Butterflies and Bambies visit you by the windowsill and animated bluebirds sing around your head. You go to the kitchen, make a cup of coffee, and read the funnies. You know the future is going to be bright, tomorrow will be as delightful as today. Hope, on the other hand, is waking up in the morning remembering the joys and sorrows of yesterday with an acute clarity, going to the kitchen for your cup of coffee, listening to the latest breaking news stories on the

radio, and knowing that times are tough, that the world has lost its moral compass. And you know, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, the future can become brighter if we work at it. The work begins with dreaming boldly, and staying woke. That old spiritual is faith-filled and hope-full. We have a lot to overcome, and yet we sing in spite of everything. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary. We sing that we shall overcome some day and I have faith, little by little, we shall.

Another poem by Langston Hughes:

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams die
life is a broken-winged bird
that can not fly.

Hold fast to dreams
for when dreams go
life is a barren field
frozen with snow.

We hope. We hold fast to our bold dreams or we may literally die. If we live without our dreams, life will be without purpose or meaning. So choose hope and dream boldly. Stay woke. The future, with our efforts, will become less creepy and weird. Nobody says it's going to be easy. In fact, pretty much everybody says justice, equality, and compassion are hard damn work ... or shall I say sacred hard work.

I was deeply moved by President Obama's challenge this week. I don't even think Harper Lee and Atticus Finch had a clue about what they were asking when they suggested we climb into another person's skin and walk around in it. We are

still learning how to dismantle racism, how to make peace, how to create economic justice. We don't have all the answers, no one has the answers. No one has ever lived in a post-racial world, no one knows how to get there. We have a lot of painful growing to do in every direction. As we learn, we will disagree and get angry and frustrated and feel like quitting.

I ask two things of you this morning, and this is hard. I ask two things of you this morning so we may stay woke and dream boldly, so we may transform the world. First, don't give up. A dream deferred is no dream at all. In fact, it isn't even life. Second, bring joy, music, color, and laughter as we learn together. If I can't dance, I'm not going to join your revolution.

Here's a pop quiz: Who was the bold dreamer, who was the prophet in the story this morning? That's right, it was the art teacher, because she saw that maybe, in spite of all the evidence, maybe Vashti might someday like drawing. She might learn to bring beauty to the world. She might even become a great artist. Someday, she might even pass the hope on to others, and still others. The teacher took a good hard look at Vashti's dot, a dot born of anger and frustration. A dot that arose only after giving up time and time again. The teacher interpreted the possibility of that paper and ink, and saw a hope-full future, and she framed that little angry, frustrated dot in gold. The teacher was the bold dreamer, she was the prophet. She was awake. Our responsibility as a prophetic church is to see what is happening all around us, pay attention, stay woke, interpret what we see, and have faith that if we gather together and inspire one another we will have the power to transform our ways and the ways of society. That's our job as a prophetic church.

A last poem by Hughes ... A poem about making your dreams beautiful. A poem that sings of how hard it is to climb into another person's skin and walk around in it. A poem that reminds us, in spite of all the evidence, to be hope-full, stay woke and dream boldly.

I take my dreams and make of them a bronze vase
and a round fountain with a beautiful statue in its center.
And a song with a broken heart and I ask you:
Do you understand my dreams?
Sometimes you say you do,
And sometimes you say you don't.
Either way it doesn't matter.
I continue to dream.

For Further Study

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Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, J.B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1960.

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