

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

January 15 and 16, 2011

Isaiah 49:1-7 “The Dream is Fulfilled – in Christ!”

Everyone has dreams. For example, there are the dreams we have in our sleep. Some dreams wake us up suddenly from restful sleep, such as Allison Dubois experiences in the television show, “Medium.” She seems to be sleeping so soundly, and then she has one of her dreams where she sees a crime committed, or about to be committed, and she suddenly wakes up in horror. I always wonder how Allison can ever get a good night’s sleep – or Joe her husband who inevitable is awakened from Allison suddenly sitting up in bed. While sometimes we might be awakened suddenly from a sound sleep because of a bad dream or nightmare, there are also nights when we have very pleasant, sweet dreams.

So there are the dreams we have in our sleep, but there are also the hopes and dreams we have when we think about our future. Do you ever dream about what could be? We have many choices we can make in life, and some of them might be the very ways we can achieve the dreams we have. This weekend we observe Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. Whatever we know or remember about King, we have probably heard portions or all of his “I have a dream” speech. In that speech, King illustrated his dream for a society where color did not make a difference and where people lived and functioned together in unity.

In this world of sin, King’s dream or our own dreams might never be fully-realized. However, it is interesting that God also has a dream for our world. Last week we heard the first of four Servant songs in Isaiah that anticipate Messiah’s coming. In today’s reading from Isaiah 49, the Servant of the Lord prepares to step forward in fulfillment of God’s dream to save and unite the world as one people.

Jesus Christ has come with full authority to announce God’s dream for the world. It was just a month ago we heard that the second person of the Holy Trinity would take our human flesh and blood into himself when he was conceived in the womb of Mary by the divine power of the Holy Spirit. This child would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us.” And indeed God did become flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ. Although he looked like you and me, underneath his humanity he is the creator of the world. God had planned this long before it actually happened, just as we heard last week. God was determined that his plan to save the world would be accomplished. And so while Jesus was still in the womb of Mary, his special work was already determined. God called him Jesus, and he gave him a authority to speak his message to the world.

Sometimes he spoke a harsh message of the law to them, and sometimes he eased their sorrow and pain with the sweet balm of the Gospel. Today we do the same thing depending on the circumstances. When Jesus’ opponents questioned his actions, criticized his words or behavior, or were just generally rotten people, Jesus’ words to them were very harsh. He would call them hypocrites, blasphemers, and worthy of eternal judgment. Jesus’ words were harsh, and his warnings of judgment extreme, because these opponents needed a harsh word to get them to repent. Some did, but others did not. They deserved what they got.

But Jesus, also, came with full authority to speak God’s Law and Gospel with the purpose of leading people to repentance. God’s preferred work is to bring peace and forgiveness to spiritually broken people. In the Gospel reading today, John calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

world.” When some of John’s disciples follow Jesus and hear what he has to say, they recognize that he is the promised Messiah. He spoke to them of forgiveness, of hope, of life. He spoke to them of God’s dream that would be fulfilled through his special work as Savior of the world.

Just as Jesus came with authority to speak God’s message to the world, Jesus came with God’s full authority to fulfill God’s dream through his special work. Jesus did not come to be served by John, his disciples, or the world. Rather, Isaiah’s 2nd Servant Song shows us what Jesus’ special title and work are to do. Jesus had come to serve others. His work would bring glory to God the Father, because Jesus would complete God’s work to restore a broken creation due to our sin. Jesus took our sins from us at the cross. While every day we personally sin against God and each other by our sins of thoughts, words, and deeds, Jesus personally took each of these sins from us and carried them to the cross. There he received the sentence of guilty because of our sins. His death was a complete sacrifice for the whole world’s sins. And when the sacrifice on the cross was complete, he gave up his life into death. God’s work to remove our sins from us was accomplished in Jesus Christ.

God accepted the sacrifice of his Son in our place, and God raised his Son from death. Witnesses saw the risen Christ for 40 days after his resurrection, and then Jesus ascended to the right hand of God where he took his place on the throne of God. He will come again one day, and he will judge all people according to their faith in his atoning work.

Everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ receives the entire forgiveness of sins. We have come to faith in what Jesus has done for us. We have been baptized into the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. We have heard the story of Christ’s birth, but we’ve also heard the story of Jesus’ work, and we believe that he died for our sins on the cross and that he rose from the dead. When Jesus rose up from the dead, so we also were raised up from spiritual death and made alive with Christ. We are united as one living, holy Christian church, built upon Jesus Christ and his atoning work.

But the unity God planned for us through Jesus Christ is not just for us. Isaiah writes that the Messiah would bring the Jewish people back to God, but also that the Messiah would bring people of all the nations back to God. God’s salvation would reach to the ends of the earth. This means that Christians everywhere in the world are united with us as one Christian church. It doesn’t matter whether we are male or female, Jew or Gentile, black or white, LCMS or ELCA, Lutheran or Presbyterian. Okay, there are some differences between the different denominational churches (and so called non-denominational churches) due to our sin, but God’s dream of one holy and Christian church is fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus came with full authority to bind God’s fallen creation as one in Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins.

Today, we have come together to worship Jesus, who is one God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Father deserves our worship because he is the creator of the world. Jesus deserves our worship because he has accomplished the world’s salvation. The Holy Spirit deserves our worship because he has delivered to us forgiveness, life and salvation through the message of Jesus Christ. The natural response of the Christian is to come together with others in unity of faith in Christ to worship God in church. It doesn’t matter what our social station is in life. We could be rich or poor, kings or peasants, leaders or followers. God calls us together, as one, to worship him in church. In heaven, there is only one church—the Church Triumphant. On earth, we might have different denominations, but there is still only one church founded on Jesus Christ. God’s dream is that we will repent of our sin and bow down and worship him as one people through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Today's reading was the second of four Servant Songs in Isaiah. The first one was last week. Both point to Jesus as the Promised Messiah who will save the world and bring it to complete unity through Jesus Christ. There are two more Servant Songs that we will hear this year – the third on Palm Sunday, and the fourth on Good Friday. What we learn from all four of these Songs is that God has a dream, or plan, for our world, and God is determined to make it happen through Jesus Christ. God calls us to unity of faith and worship through Jesus Christ. And this is good news for us and all people.

soli deo gloria