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“God Sized Dreams”

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Romans 12:14-21

Today is Human Relations Day in the church, a day designated by the denomination to fall right before the Martin Luther King Holiday and invite us to think about what it means to be a part of a diverse human family and support worthy efforts to bring hope and possibility to those who struggle. This is what the United Methodist Church does in a million ways every day. I was so proud of Jim Gully, whom you may have heard about—a very active member of our Rocky Mountain Conference, who was in Haiti during the earthquake. He was featured on the front page of the Denver Post yesterday. Buried in the rubble of his hotel for over 50 hours, he arrived home safely Friday night. Of course, thousands of people were not so lucky, and estimates are that between 50,000 and 100,000 people perished in that horrific disaster. Of course, our church will be there to help the survivors rebuild their lives. Long after other relief organizations have gone, the United Methodist Church will be there. This sort of tragedy is unimaginable, but it does bring out the best in humanity—as diverse people come together to bless those who suffer.

But this is not always the case. Human beings do not always work together or get along, or even help each other very much. From the earliest times of human civilization people have fought and disagreed, even to the point of death. So Human Relations Day is a time to think about building bridges of peace, understanding and cooperation.

Our faith gives us strategies for this endeavor. The first of Paul’s letters in the Bible is the longest, weightiest, and most influential. Written between 54 and 58 AD, Romans outlines Paul’s theological beliefs at their most mature. He is advising the Christians in Rome to live in peace, to overcome evil with good. He encourages them to have peace within so they can manifest peace without. He tells them they need to live in unity, with compassion for all.

This weekend we are remembering a man who had the same vision, a man who tried to unite his country along racial lines, and it was a fatal effort for him. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a God-sized dream, deeply rooted in the American dream. He saw a county of equal opportunity, treatment and justice for everyone. He never allowed the scope of his dream to be diminished by the reality of the world around him, nor did he indulge in resentment or bitterness. After he became the national spokesman for the civil rights movement, he received over 40 death threats a day, some of them threatening the lives of his wife and 4 children. His house was bombed, crosses were burned on his lawn, politicians called him a

communist troublemaker, and J. Edgar Hoover called him the most notorious liar in America. He would not give up. He said, “Only when it is dark enough can you really see the stars.” He met hatred with love and violence with peace. To his most bitter enemies he said: “Do to us what you will, and we shall still love you. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Send you hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at night and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.”

For all of his titles and accomplishments, more than anything else King defined himself as a Christian minister who tried to follow Jesus at all costs. He graduated from High School at the age of 15, from college at 19, and seminary at 22. At the age of 25 he was made pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and at 26 he received a doctorate from Boston University. He was 28 when chosen to lead the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and just 34 when he delivered the “I Have a Dream Speech.” At 35 he won the Nobel Prize for Peace, the youngest person ever to do so. And by the age of 39, he was dead. He never saw his 40th birthday.

In March of 1968 he went to Memphis to offer his support to city sanitation workers. Most of these workers were black, and they went on strike for safer working conditions, more pay, and equal treatment. Unfortunately, several militant groups turned the march into something violent, and so King announced that he would never participate in violence. He tells them that he is going to leave and come back to Memphis later to lead a march that was non-violent. He returned to Memphis on April 3, 1968, amid several death threats and great tension. He spoke at a rally on behalf of the sanitation workers, in what would be his last speech. He told of an earlier attempt on his life, one that brought him perilously close to death. He stood up that night, knowing that there were people in the audience that wanted to kill him, and he said:

“When I arrived in Memphis this morning people immediately began to talk about all of the threats out on me and about what might happen to me from

some of our sick white brothers. Well, I don't know what will happen.

But it really doesn't matter to me now. Because I have been to the mountaintop. I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And God had allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I have looked over and I have seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And I am happy tonight. I am not worried about anything. I am not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." (*I've Been To the Mountaintop*, Martin Luther King, Jr., April 3, 1968) The next day he was dead.

What would give someone such inner peace, such unusual calm? How could he be so accepting of whatever might happen to him? It is really remarkable. Referring to an earlier attempt on his life when a demented woman stabbed him at a bookstore in New York City, he wrote: "If I demonstrated unusual calm during the attempt on my life, it was certainly not due to any extraordinary powers that I possess. Rather, it was due to the power of God working through me. Throughout this struggle for racial justice I have constantly asked God to remove all bitterness from my heart and to give me the strength and courage to face any disaster that came my way. This constant prayer life and dependence upon God has given me the sense that I have divine companionship in this struggle. I know of no other way to explain it. God has given me deep inner peace." (*The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Chapter 12 "Brush With Death")

He manifested that peace, no matter what was going on around him. I believe it was due to the depth of his faith and the scope of his dream. He knew the dream would outlast him. He knew it was consistent with God's dream for humankind. All of the followers of Jesus should be dreaming God sized dreams. For all social change and human achievement are rooted in dreams. That's what followers of Jesus are called to do--dream God sized dreams no matter how impossible, and then work to make those dreams a reality.

Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay were the very first people to reach the top of Mount Everest. It happened on Hillary's third try. On his previous

attempts he not only failed to reach the summit, but his team also lost one of its members. After the failed attempts, Hillary spoke about his experience. Behind him on the platform was a huge photograph of Everest. Hillary turned toward the photograph and said, "Mount Everest, you have defeated us. But I will return. And I will defeat you. Because you cannot get any bigger ... but I can." Getting bigger started inside of him with the faith that he could do it. Jesus said, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Edmund Hillary became 'bigger than Everest' through better planning, more detailed research, greater teamwork, and tenacious perseverance. And it started with faith -- the faith that this impossible mountain could be conquered.

Most likely you are facing a mountain or two today: a mountain of debt or fear, worry or uncertainty. Mountains don't move without determined effort, thoughtful planning, or courageous perseverance. But more than anything else, it is faith that will give you the wherewithal to survive something bigger than you. Not faith in ourselves, but faith in the God for whom nothing is impossible.

Can racism and sexism and homophobia be overcome in our lifetimes? Can every child go to bed at night with a full stomach and a roof over their heads? Can people learn to accept and care for those who are very different from themselves? Can we forgive people who hate us and attack us? Disciples dream God sized dreams, no matter how impossible they seem.

Jesus offered a remarkable list of the kind of dreams that his followers should be dreaming. Jesus says that the poor shouldn't just dream about getting a roof over their heads or shoes on their feet. They will receive it. Jesus says that the hungry should not just dream of getting enough to eat. They will be filled and satisfied. The weeping and sorrowful do not just dream about their burdens being lifted. Laughter and delight will fill their hearts, and joy will penetrate every dark corner of their lives. Enriched and empowered, satisfied and fulfilled, joyfully alive, this is the sort of God-sized dreams Jesus has for all of his people.

You see, we are called to not only make a difference in this world, but make a different world; not only make a difference in life, but to make life different for our human family.

This is what the apostle Paul was encouraging the early Christians to do in writing to the Romans about unity: "Let love be genuine; bless your enemies; live in peace and harmony with all people, discover beauty in

everyone.” Elsewhere he wrote: “There is neither Greek nor Jew, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Awhile ago I read something that I have never forgotten. “A mother and child are not one person, but they are not two either. They are some mystical number in between.” I think that applies to all of us. We are clearly not one, but we are also not two, nor 7 Billion, but some mystical number in between. We are all intimately related under the tender care of our loving parent in Heaven. So let’s dream God sized dreams and then work together to make those dreams a reality.

And all God’s people said: **Amen!**

Let us pray....

Unison Prayer....

God of all nations and peoples: We are grateful for the dreams of freedom, justice, and peace inspired by your Spirit and promoted by prophets in every age. We are grateful that you call us to erase hatred and expand compassion as we continue the work of Jesus in our day. Today we give you thanks for all of the dreamers of the ages whose names are known and unknown, whose courage and conviction has promoted peace and unity for our human family around the world. May we remember that no matter how dark the night, how deep the despair, how heavy the heartache, one day justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. May peace abide within us and around us, and between all of our brothers and sisters in our human family.

Remain seated as we sing “Let There Be Peace on Earth”