
Waking Up Some More

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Fifth Sunday in Lent – Year C**

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
and our tongue with shouts of joy.
Then they said among the nations, *
"The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.
Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves. (Psalm 126-1-7)*

Yes, "when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream."

Have you ever had a hard time waking up?

I don't mean those times when you just didn't want to get out of bed. I mean those times when you wanted to get out of bed, but you couldn't. Maybe you thought it was morning, but it wasn't. You were ready to get up, but it was still the middle of the night.

Then maybe you dreamed that it was morning, but it was still night. You forced yourself to stay in bed, and dream some more.

Sometimes, it takes a long time to wake up.

Last year, in March of 2021, just over one year ago, I preached on this beautiful psalm, "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream." We were worshipping inside this beautiful space of the Cathedral of St. Philip for the first time in over a year.

It felt wonderful. It felt like we were waking up. It felt like we were waking up from a dream. And, to a good extent, we were. Some of us were seeing each other for the first time in over a year.

But, as we all know, our pandemic continued. Many of us gathered, but many of us did not. Many of us took our masks off, and then many of us put them back on. Many of us found awkward and clumsy ways to take communion together. Many of us faithfully refrained. It felt like we were waking up.

"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream." But dreams take a long time. Good dreams take a long time to become real. And real awakenings take a long time. Waking up takes a long time.

Maybe that is what this past year has taught us. Even when we dream something wonderful and glorious, it takes a long time to accomplish that dream. We dreamed of growing out of the COVID pandemic, and we are doing so; but it takes a long time.

Consider the dreams of the Bible. The Old Testament patriarch, Joseph, dreamed of his brothers bowing down to him. That would not happen until decades later. Later, Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh to mean, first, seven sleek and fat years, and then seven hungry and lean years. That means it took at least fourteen years before the dream was actualized.

Another Joseph, in the New Testament, dreamed that his young wife would have a child. That, of course, would take at least nine months to occur. The same Joseph would be warned in a dream, later, to flee to Egypt. That took around two years.

Dreams take a long time to become real. Another dreamer, in 1963, told the United States of America that he had a dream. Martin Luther King, Jr, said "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." That was sixty years ago. But dreams take a long time to become real.

The psalmist continues, "Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves."

I know we have done a lot of weeping in the past two years. We have wept for ourselves, for our loved ones. We have wept for others, for people in our own country killed senselessly, for the people of Ukraine. We have simply wept.

But I pray we have also been carrying some seeds in our weeping. I pray we have been carrying the seeds of grace and good will, the seeds of wisdom and prudence, the seeds of love and loving kindness.

Those are powerful seeds, but they take time to grow. The full grown oak of righteousness does not appear overnight. The golden fields of love do not appear overnight. Each of us does not become holy overnight. Holiness and love take time.

There is still another threatening virus in our midst, and in our time. It goes by many names. It is the virus of immediate gratification, the virus of quick fixes, the virus of addiction to quick stimulations, the virus of having to check out our cell phones, minute by minute, seeking that latest dopamine kick. It is the virus of believing that the latest breaking news, of whatever sort, the mere quick knowledge of it, will somehow satisfy our deepest cravings.

That is the virus that is still with us. The virus of immediate gratification, impatience, and short attention spans.

If nothing else, this Lent of the year 2022 has slowed us down again. That is okay. It is okay to go slow. It is okay to let seeds rest in the ground until their time comes. It is okay to take our time.

"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream." But dreams take a long time to become real. Last year, a year ago, when I preached on this beautiful psalm, my point was that we were actually waking up to become priests. Each of us, whether formally ordained or not, is part of a holy priesthood of believers.

I still think that is what we are waking up to. It takes time, but we are waking up into a new identity, the identity of being Jesus in the world, actually the identity of priesthood. We are to be priests, all of us.

A priest is someone who takes the time, to bear the pain of another, to endure the illnesses of others. Like Jesus. A priest is someone who even takes on the illnesses of others, becomes infected with them, and for them, so that they —and the world—can be healed.

That is the ministry of Jesus, and it is the ministry of each of us. We are to be priests for each other. We are to be like Jesus for each other.

Every time we bear another person's burden, we are being the vaccine for that other person. Like Jesus, every time we bear another person's burden, we are being a vaccine for that other person. In acknowledging the burdens of that other person, sharing them, we are somehow enabling that person, that body, that system, to become healthy. It's a holy miracle, like setting up an image for someone in need to gaze upon. We are to be images of goodness, models of holiness for others. Yes, it takes time.

And when we help that other person to be healthy, even just one other person, we are helping the entire world to be healthy. We are saving the world. Just like an effective vaccine. "For God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." That is our ministry, too, the ministry of each of us.

When we absorb the pain of another person, and treat it with grace and goodness – when we see evil and treat it with justice and truth – when we plant seeds of wisdom and prudence in the fields of ignorance – we are growing into Jesus Christ our Lord. We are preparing to reap with songs of joy, to come in shouldering the sheaves. We might just be preparing for Easter, the resurrection.

Yes, of course it takes time. It takes time for the Lord to restore the fortunes of Zion. It takes time for good dreams to become real. But they will. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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