

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole CA
Second Sunday of Pentecost June 14, 2020

“Creating New Dreams”
Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning, so glad to see your faces. I guess this is church in Hollywood squares. As I am sure you know, the world continues to struggle with the pandemic, the injustice in our society, economic uncertainty and climate change. There are people in Flint Michigan who still do not have clean water, children in cages at the border, and I am sure you can add to this list, as well as your own personal stresses.

You, just as I, are probably struggling with having one foot in the world we used to know, and one foot in the world of chaos; a new world that is struggling to be born, and the tension is immense.

If you have read the email attachments that have been sent to you by the Diocese, you will realize that the Episcopal Church has put in an all encompassing cry to its church and people to become actively involved in fighting the systemic racism that continues to rear its ugly head. With that in mind, we are actually forced into living the Gospel today, and Jesus' call to discipleship.

This is the year 2020. In 1970, as an 11 year old child if you would have asked me what to imagine or dream up what the year 2020 would look like, I can assure you I imagined the world of George Jetson, flying cars, and robots to clean my room. The military would be on a starship, and it would not be unusual to see Lt. Uhura as a black woman at the helm of a flying battleship. Nor would it matter if you

were an alien with scaly skin, pointed ears or green blood, you would part of the universe and therefore accepted.

To be honest, I was privileged to be raised in a rather lukewarm Christian, middle/working class, white neighborhood, unaware of what other 11-year-olds who were different from me might be experiencing. I had no way of knowing that I lived in a period of redlining, and for us, other things were our focus. Of course Walter Cronkite was on the news and the war raged on, and my parents told me “the world was going to hell in a hand basket.” Yes, they said that back in 1970 when they thought the world was falling apart. Little did they know that what they didn’t handle then would become the crisis of today.

In 1963 Martin Luther King gave his “I Have a Dream Speech” that depicted a world of social justice where people of color could dream big dreams; the harsh history of violence and injustice could become true history, in the past, and part of a learning tool.

Many times the world did not respond. There were people dying in the streets, protesters jailed, tear gas at protests, Olympians raising their fists, people of color taking a knee, and many more acts trying to bring forth the problem of racism to be changed. In a country that at one time considered itself moral and mostly Christian, we were as misguided as those who thought it appropriate to cast a stone on the prostitute with judgment in hand. These misguided efforts formed our government and especially our policing system.

The world we have created has not fostered the lessons of Jesus’ teachings. We have created a whole system that throws stone after stone in moral judgment by

those who themselves are also sinful. The moral code of the ten commandments or the simple love-thy-neighbor call from Jesus continues to be a struggle. If anyone feels that the world we have now is Christian, you may have a larger problem. In fact, I am sure the world we have created was done so with the thought that they were following God's teachings. Yet they are not the way of Jesus. We have learned, and now we need to do better.

Somehow, we have gone from King's "I have a dream" - which in all its essence is a plea for restructuring society along with a hope that justice and peace will come - to a 17-year-old millennial non-gender conforming girl writing a song that speaks about suicide when considering today's world. And even after having gained every privilege, she writes - "I had a dream I got everything I wanted, not what you'd think and if I'm being honest it might have been a nightmare" - to anyone who might care.

The despair of someone so young, who at 17 realizes all that glitters is not gold, and that money and fame only contributes to the injustices of the world and doesn't bring acceptance, brings me to tears. I have been in conversation with some of the folks on the front line for social change and it is scary out there. But this is what Jesus was calling us to do from the very beginning. From the very first time he called the disciples to preach the good news he knew it was not going to be easy. "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you... Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name."

For as much as we envision Jesus the Good Shepherd as a loving gentle guide, we must also see the side of him that knew the hearts of people and that they could contain evil, violence, and inhumanity. It was this inhumanity that nailed him to the cross, this inhumanity of God's need to forgive us for "not knowing what we do" to each other that continues on today.

Jesus knew this well as he explains in our Gospel that if the disciples were not welcomed to move on to areas more open to change, places where people could hear their message. But he never said to quit.

And you may be hearing this and thinking I am preaching to the choir. You may think you can no longer contribute due to age, health, the pandemic etc. You may feel you have no prejudices, therefore you are unaffected. But you are, we all are. And that is the point, you matter, and your voice and actions count, you are a follower of Jesus and you have been called. Maybe you are called to pack sandwiches, stand on a protest line, or support Black Businesses. But maybe you are called to re-educate yourself, stamp envelopes demanding change, or just be a listener to someone in distress. Casting out unclean spirits and healing the disease of people can be as simple as opening your heart to someone different than yourself. You know that, you do that, let's clearly model that – be vocal about your willingness to be a follower of Jesus who calls us to live in a Beloved Community. There are many tears and frustrations being experienced by people who don't need to be told what to do, but instead, need to be listened to with compassion.

"Let us boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not

disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Maybe we will not have a year filled with flying cars or starships, but the hope that the community Jesus has called us to be can start forming. It is bigger and better than we can imagine, but getting there is going to take work. Maybe Martin Luther King’s dream can become a reality and we can remove the nightmare our young people are feeling.

I leave you with a meditation from Bishop Steven Charleston:

“Now is the moment for which a lifetime of faith has prepared you. All of those years of prayer and study, all of the worship services, all of the time devoted to a community of faith: it all comes down to this, this sorrowful moment when life seems chaotic and the anarchy of fear haunts the thin borders of reason. Your faith has prepared you for this. It has given you the tools you need to respond: to proclaim justice while standing for peace. Long ago the spirit called you to commit your life to faith. Now you know why. You are a source of strength for those who have lost hope. You are a voice of calm in the midst of chaos. You are a steady light in days of darkness. The time has come to be what you believe.”

Go forth in the name of the Lord, like a sheep among wolves, with a shepherd who has already overcome the worst of what humanity can be - even death itself was overcome. Go forth and endure to grow your character in the name of the Lord. Go forth to bring peace and comfort where there is none, go forth to cure the disease, and set the captive free. This is what Jesus commanded. **Amen**

