

## DREAMS: FULFILLED AND UNFULFILLED

*<sup>14</sup>Then King Solomon turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. <sup>15</sup>He said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, <sup>16</sup>'Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there; but I chose David to be over my people Israel.' <sup>17</sup>My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>18</sup>But the LORD said to my father David, 'You did well to consider building a house for my name; <sup>19</sup>nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.' <sup>20</sup>Now the LORD has upheld the promise that he made; for I have risen in the place of my father David; I sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>21</sup>There I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of the land of Egypt."*

(I Kings 8:14-21, NRSV)

If you want something done right, ask a professional, right? I guess that's why ministers are always being invited to events so that they can give the prayer. Truth be told, almost anyone could offer a prayer. But evidently not many are interested, because I can tell you for a fact that there's not a lot of competition out there for the task. Once a month or so, I head out to a parade or a banquet or some other collective gathering, in order to offer the prayer. It's one of those things that ministers do.

On Friday, I found myself doing it once again, and I was really looking forward to it. I was giving the benediction at a Martin Luther King Jr. celebration that's held every year at North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset. Dr. King is one of my personal heroes, and besides that, it seems like whenever I attend this event, I get to meet someone interesting. Two years ago it was Civil Rights leader, Julian Bond. Last year it was former Governor Mario Cuomo. This year, I met a rabbi named David Rabinowitz who was there, by the way, to give the invocation. When I talked to the rabbi, I was surprised to learn that he had actually known Dr. King. He wasn't old enough to have marched in the famous civil rights marches in the 1950's and '60's. So I wondered how he knew Dr. King. It turns out that King was an old family friend who used to stop in for visits when he was in Manhattan. Rabbi Rabinowitz then told me a story that occurred when he was 12 years old. Dr. King visited the boy's family and promised him that if it were at all possible, he would attend the boy's bar mitzvah, which was only a few months away. It was 1968 when he made that promise. We all know that on April 4<sup>th</sup> of that year, Dr. King's life was cut short by an assassin's bullet. Hopes dashed and dreams unfulfilled on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. The rabbi concluded his story saying, "It

was the only time I saw my father cry. King didn't make it to my bar mitzvah, but the fact that he wanted to come meant so much."

Today's scripture lesson tells the story of Solomon building God's temple. The story of Solomon building that temple starts with another story—a story where the dream lies unfulfilled. You see building the temple was not Solomon's idea. It was actually Solomon's father, David, who wanted more than anything to build it. But David, who is so well known for defeating the giant Goliath, never got to build the temple due to his illicit relationship with Bathsheba. The scriptures tell us that God chose David's son, Solomon, to build it instead. In the book of Kings we read, "Now it was in the heart of David...to build a house [a temple] for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to David...' you did well that it was in your heart; nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name" (RSV). When David died, his dream of building a temple for God remained unfulfilled.

We all know what it's like to live with unfulfilled dreams. Dr. King knew too. In the early 1960's he preached a sermon called, "Unfulfilled Dreams" in which he said, "So many of us in life start out building temples: temples of character, temples of justice, temples of peace. And so often we don't finish them. Because life is like Schubert's 'Unfinished Symphony.' At so many points we start, we try, we set out to build our various temples. And I guess one of the great agonies of life is that we are constantly trying to finish that which is unfinishable. We are commanded to do that. And so we, like David, find ourselves in so many instances having to face the fact that our dreams are not fulfilled" ([www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular\\_requests/](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular_requests/)).

Most of us don't live with such grand dreams as making a whole nation more just or building a gilded temple for God, but we all have dreams—even if they're small, even if they're secret. Sometimes it's hard to admit our dreams to each other, or even ourselves. We'd be embarrassed if they didn't come true. But they are there. One of my dreams, which most of you know about even though I haven't talked about it publicly, is to adopt a child from Ukraine. Colleen and I began dreaming this dream shortly after Matthew was born, and began seriously working on it two years ago. We've faced a lot of setbacks, but we haven't given up. In fact, we may be traveling soon. More on that if and when it becomes official. Today I just want to share with you the news of our dream, and to ask you to ask yourselves, "What are you dreaming today? For yourselves, for your family, for our church, and our world?"

Part of our job as a church is to dream dreams together. It's a good job. We take our faith and our resources. We take what we know from the life of Christ. We add it all up and we start to dream the dreams. Sometimes I think about the hopes and dreams of the founders of our church back in 1941. They didn't have a sanctuary—WW II delayed that dream until 1949. They didn't have an educational building for Sunday School or Vacation Bible School—that had to wait until the 1950's. They certainly didn't have a music center with a stair-stepped practice space for the choir, nice offices for the choir

director and organist, and plenty of storage space for the music library. For this we had to wait until 2002.

Each generation has added to our church. But the founders of our church dreamed of more than buildings. They dreamed of what would happen inside. The whole point of the structures was to do God's work, to share the love of Christ, to comfort the brokenhearted, to offer hope to the hopeless, to teach children the Bible's message of love and kindness, to teach youth the importance and joy of serving those less fortunate, to encourage adults to lead a new way of life as followers of Christ. And to bring all of that head and heart knowledge beyond our doors and out into the world.

We've come a long way these past 63 years and still we carry hopes and dreams for our future. Many of our dreams involve supporting Dr. King's dream of a just and peaceful society, with equal opportunity and freedom for all. On this MLK weekend, I like to think that Dr. King would be proud of Maggie Grundman founding our Adventures in Learning program for at-risk children in 1969. I like to think he would be inspired by the beautiful music sung by our choir. I like to think he would approve of our Angel Tree that helps organizations who feed the hungry, build wheel chair ramps for the elderly, and protect women and children from domestic violence. I believe he would look kindly on our work at the Saratoga Family Inn to love and nurture homeless children. And I feel sure he would commend the relationship we're nurturing with East Harlem's Booker T. Washington Center.

Not only do I think that Dr. King would approve, but more importantly, Jesus would approve, for the work we're doing carries on the ministry that Jesus started. When we collect food at Thanksgiving we carry on Christ's ministry of feeding the hungry. When we educate our children in Sunday School and our adults in seminars we carry on Christ's ministry of teaching. When we open our chapel for funerals and memorial services we carry on Christ's ministry of comforting the grief stricken. When we host weddings in our sanctuary we continue Christ's ministry of blessing life's joyous moments. Through all of these efforts and through the ideas we've yet to dream up, we are in fact fulfilling the dreams of Jesus.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus told his disciples to go and baptize and teach others to follow God's way of love. Although he had laid the foundation, Jesus knew that the temple was far from being built. For 2,000 years the church has tried to build on the foundational ministry of Christ. Sometimes it's made progress and at other times, its hatred has only torn things down.

Those of us sitting here today can't control the universal church, but we are responsible for what happens within and through our own family of faith. We are responsible for continuing to build on the dreams of others, and dreaming dreams of our own. And decades from now, our children and our children's children will continue to fulfill the dreams for this congregation that we began in 2004.

As we move into the days and weeks ahead, may God restore our hearts where dreams lie broken, restore our faith where dreams lie unfulfilled, and may God kindle within us new dreams for a future—a future that rests securely in the palm of God’s hand. AMEN.

Written by Rev. Jimmy Only  
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## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Loving God, for the sake of the whole human race, give us the courage to speak boldly on behalf of those who have no voice. Give us courage to act boldly for those who have few choices in life. Give us courage to intercede boldly when someone is causing injury to another. Forgive us when we shut our eyes to the vast needs of others. Forgive us if we use pious words as a substitute for action. Inspire us to improve the quality of life for others. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us bring about the wholeness and justice you desire for all your people.

Thank you for the dreamers and prophets who have lived and died that this world might be a better place. Today we especially thank you for the life and ministry of Martin Luther King, Jr. May his urgent call for action deliver us from our complacency on this day and in the days to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Parts of this prayer were adapted from *The Whole People of God* Worship Resources 2001, unit 4, p. 25.