**SERMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY | 30.05.21**

**Isaiah 6: 1-8; Acts 2: 14-2; St John 3: 1-17**

**Reflecting on today’s first reading, the great vision of heaven in Isaiah Chapter 6, I began to think about dreams – and what we dream about. Did you know that on average, we all have five dreams a night – lasting from 15 to 40 minutes?! So if you manage to get eight hours sleep a night (lucky you!), then a quarter of that time is spent dreaming!**

**Dreaming about what? According to sleep expert Sam Atherton, these are the top ten: 1 your teeth are falling out; 2 you are being chased; 3 you can’t find a toilet; 4 you are naked in public; 5 you are unprepared for an exam; 6 you are able to fly on your own; 7 you are falling from a very high place; 8 you are in a car crash; 9 you are in a room you don’t recognise; and finally, 10 you are late for an appointment. Do any of these ring bells? Apparently each of these dreams indicates some particular issue that is literally ‘playing on your mind’ as you sleep.**

**What surprised me is that, in that list, there are absolutely no connections with the things of God – certainly nothing like Isaiah’s vision; none of them involves being taken up into heaven and seeing *the Lord, high and lifted up – the hem of his robe filling the Temple.* Neither do any of them involve hot coals or calls to go and preach! Yet throughout Acts, the source for our second reading there are any number of significant dreams and premonitions: St Paul dreams of a man in the far province of Macedonia asking him to come and work with them; Agabus is warned in a dream that there will be a great famine and that Paul will be arrested; and Cornelius is told in a dream to go and seek out St Peter with the result that his whole household is converted and baptised.**

**So taking the lead from these two Bible passages I began to think more about the value of dreams and visions. Why? Because they seem to lie at the heart of the calling to be an active Christian. As St Peter declares: *God says, I will pour out my Spirit and from then on, your sons and daughters shall prophecy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams…* words which Peter quotes directly from the Old Testament prophet Joel which ends: *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; there will be deliverance among all those whom the Lord has called.***

**So that is the promise: wherever God sends his Holy Spirit there will be new dreams, new visions, new ideas and new directions emerging among his people. And to be fair that has been the experience of the Church ever since. There have always been people who have, like Isaiah, allowed their dreams to make powerful contributions to the life of the Church.**

**A quick tour of Church history will remind us, for example, of the dream of St Francis of Assisi to rebuild the Church in a new way in the 13th century, leaving behind his wealth for a new life of poverty; or the mystic St Catherine of Siena whose dreams gave her the courage (as a mere woman) to persuade the Pope in the 14th century to return to Rome from Avignon. Or the famous ‘I have a dream’ speech of Martin Luther King in 1968 where he foresees the day when black and white, rich and poor could live together in peace.**

**Then I read an article by Austin Ivereigh who talk about the way Pope Francis in our day is recommending we take the Book of Acts as the catalyst for a sea change in the way Christians live and work today: *There you will see how the Holy Spirit shows us how to set aside what is no longer of use and to focus on what will enable us to live…* Indeed in his latest letter *‘Let us dream’* he lays out a new invitation: no longer are we to be controlled by what we have always done, or by think tanks and top down policies sent down by the management. Instead, he suggests, we must learn to trust a different source altogether: *our own sons and daughters shall dream dreams*; ordinary people, filled by the Spirit, will have visions because the Spirit of God continues to work amongst us. So how does that play out as we begin to look at our future, here at St James’? And the answer is, I don’t know.**

**All I know is that the Spirit has a great deal to teach us and that these truths lie just underneath the surface, just waiting to be discovered. But, as in many things in life, that is only likely to happen when two other factors are recognised. The first is when we learn to let go of ways of working that aren’t fruitful any more. Daniel Berrigan, writing about the Book of Acts, says that it should be subtitled ‘the Book of Wonders’. And he compares the activity of the early Church to today’s Church where, he says, we are frightened to death by the onslaught and energy of the world around us: bishops and priests generally frantic or just half-coping. *Have we,* he says, *simply given in to the world’s standards, more interested in our own survival than in what the Holy Spirit can achieve through those who trust him?***

**And the second thing we need to rediscover is solidarity.**

**As I wrote this I made a quick note of all the ‘groups’ that make up St James’, symbolised by the picture on the front of today’s pew sheet. By chance there are twelve people (some more visible than others!) ranging from a one year old to someone in their early 70s: they are from seven different nations: retired, working, in education; some are in service industries, others are professionals. Amongst us here at St James’ we have vets and architects, chefs and writers, shopworkers, bankers, teachers and those in the military; careworkers, entrepreneurs, academics and scientists; some single, some partnered, some married; black, white, gay and straight, rich and poor. The talent here is legion!**

**And into that mix the Holy Spirit comes as a friend - and as an irritant! In the silence of our prayer the Spirit says: looking at you all, what is possible? What can we achieve together?**

**To which we say: *ah, but hold on a minute, this is all well and good but we are also very busy; we don’t mix that much because – to be honest – those differences mean we don’t really have that much in common…***

**And it is at that point that we need to go back to basics. Unlike our Jewish and Muslim cousins, we know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From the very beginning our One God is known and experienced in and through different roles and yet Jesus says: *I and the Father are One.* When people visit the Church as they so often do, they see one congregation – but each of us as representatives of that great gathering, doing different things in different ways but gaining our strength from belonging to one another.**

**And we need to rediscover that too. But how? Through dreaming! This *‘Time to Dream’* initiative which we start today, Trinity Sunday, is not rocket science. But it is a reclaiming of the promise that *the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth* if we are prepared to let go of the old certainties – and dream dreams. And so for the next six months, to the end of 2021, we look forward to lots of conversations – one-to-ones and in small groups – asking ourselves: how we can build on what we have and how can we be released from anything that holds us back from being that diverse, welcoming community of friends that remains open to whatever the Holy Spirit has in mind for us? Dreaming - in the spirit of Acts - is our task this year.**