

Sermon for the Solemn Festival Evensong for the Feast of All Saint's, St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, November 7, 2009, The Rev. Jan O'Neil

“Three Dreams” (Based on the Gospel from lectionary: Luke 6:20-36)

I had a dream. I had a dream last Sunday. Not a dream that changes the world. Maybe not even a dream that makes sense to you. Yet I want to tell you about how this dream changed me.

How many of you remember your dreams? Often? Almost never? I've heard that we can be trained to remember dreams. The truth is that I almost never recall them. So when someone asks me if I dream, I at least say, “I don't remember them” before someone reminds me, “We all dream.” and I say, “Oh, yah.”

Let me tell you about my dream last Sunday, November 1, unique because I remember it. I was in a room looking for my daughter Karyn. I was calm with no panic. I was looking for my young child Karyn, and couldn't find her until I went into a back room and there she was as the adult she is, playing with her two young children... I felt only pleasure, but did not tarry and, strangely, I continued to search for her. I was looking for a young girl and then, quietly, I became the young girl being searched for...and then felt found. I woke up maintaining a sense of peace. I said to myself, “This is All Saint's Day”—the first one without my mom who died September 2. Then, I deeply sensed my mom looking for me and finding me—now I, not my daughter, am the young girl in that last room---found--yet, at the same time my mom and I are not isolated, but connected in the dream with my daughter and her children nearby—four generations linked. I don't think I have ever had quite such a visceral grasp of what All Saint's could mean for me; somehow in God's loving communion all four generations were connected in a calm easy manner: the living, the dead, and the lives flowing from my mom and me. Wow!

After coffee and getting dressed I wrapped my mom's purple and red scarf around my neck and came here, robed with my mom, and I came to serve as your deacon and to pray for and connect with God's expansive communion of saints. Today at Evensong we again honor All Saint's Day as we are in touch with the thin places that Emily mentioned

last week in her sermon where God blesses us with permeability between generations. This evening we honor all of us, all creation, those living and those who have died, and those who are yet to come.

A second dream. Jesus' dream. In the Gospel from Luke, Jesus dreams of a changed world that turns the culture upside down. His dream uses words that are so familiar that sometimes we miss the enormity of the change Jesus describes. "Blessed are you who are poor" says Jesus in Luke's gospel. Some translations say "Happy are"...but closest to the Greek is "'To be honored' are you who are poor, honored are you who are hungry now... honored are you who are hated and excluded..." In Jesus' culture wealth, power and good fortune were often seen as signs of God's favor. Jesus says that is not the truth. The wealthy, the full and satisfied, struggle to know their need for God and dependence on God. For Jesus to declare that the underclass is blessed is scandalous.

Note that the Gospel of Luke's Beatitudes do not start with "Blessed are those who feed the hungry." It is very clear "Blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you who are poor." From a recurring theme, we learn we cannot earn our God's blessing by feeding the hungry (remember the rich man from a few weeks ago) or by our good works. Blessings are a gift. The poor are blessed because they need God and know it—not because God thinks hunger or children suffering is acceptable. Jesus' dream is to have a world whose values are turned upside down, inside out.

A third dream. This is our dream for St. Timothy's that each of us can be part of bringing in God's kingdom here on earth through our Outreach. At St. Tim's we are empowered by God to have a dream that can change you and me by changing small pockets of the world—tonight Sudan—tonight through Trivia night—and, of course, through all of our Outreach during the year. Our dream of giving water, giving shelter, giving education is about basic things—but huge things. It's a dream to remember that can turn another part of the world upside down...and God offers us all wholeness and transformation in the process.

The addendum to Jesus' Sermon on the Plain commands us not to help others in order to earn a reward—and not to expect anything in return. Rather we reach out to the poor because God loves us first and we share that love with others. When we share our wealth and gifts, we do so because of God's love and through God's love. We are co-creators with God. Tonight we do so because we are one with the people of Lui—when one child lacks schooling, water, shelter, safety, we are diminished. God has woven us together as one fabric in the communion of Saints and until all are whole, we cannot rest.

Just imagine how visibly and invisibly full St. Timothy's is this evening—the choir, you in the pews, our companions in Lui, all those connected to all of us from generation to generation. We are all here. We are truly a communion of Saints.

Three dreams. There is power in dreams. Let us dream. There is power in action. Let us act. When we do, God offers us transformation. Thanks be to God. Amen.