

Keeping the Dream Alive! Reading: Matthew 5:1-12 Epiphany 4/A-Annual Meeting
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfried; Trinity Episcopal Church, Sutter Creek, CA 1/29/17

When we bought the house on Argonaut Drive six years ago, it came with three sets of blueprints. The original owner actually designed and oversaw the construction of this master-craftsman home. His “big picture” was that of a three bedroom home, 1800 square feet, taking advantage of the scenic views of the foothills. He wanted the house designed in such a way that would address the needs of his disabled son as well as satisfy the desires of his wife. So he built wide hallways, a large shower with a bench, and a vanity illuminated by many lights in the master bedroom. Being energy conscious, he insulated the house (both ceiling and floors) with about 10” of insulation. Being environmentally considerate, he installed low maintenance landscape. That was the big picture. However if you look at the blueprints, there are many smaller details specifying layout, size of each room, placement of electrical outlets, skylights, plumbing requirements, windows and doors. The blueprints serve as a map that specifies particulars for his vision of this home.

It is always a good idea to have a specific plan when trying to achieve a goal. In order to keep moving towards one’s dreams and not be distracted or discouraged by the trials and tribulations of life, it is important to have clarity regarding the big picture as well as specificity in laying out the particulars.

As Christians, we can sometimes lose sight of the big picture, being distracted by the many voices in our culture, afraid of losing what we have, or settling for some cozy idea of parish life. To lose sight of God’s dream is to lose sight of the purpose of our faith journey. God’s dream for this world is that all creation will live in harmony. It is a dream where the operating principles are compassion, generosity, justice, peace, mercy, inclusivity, and sacrifice. These summarize the big picture in a nutshell, which is also referred to as “the kingdom of God.” It is what we pray for every time we say the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

So we gather together in Christian community each week to understand the dream, to learn how to embrace the mind of Christ, and to be transformed into a people who are motivated by love, not fear. In today’s gospel story, commonly referred to as “the beatitudes,” Jesus bestows God’s blessings on a variety of people. They are not necessarily the kind of people we would think of as being blessed. The blessings contained in this so-called “sermon on the mount” are part of the blueprints, specifying God’s priorities, leading us Christians to better understand how to support God’s dream for our world.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside with his disciples. This was his message (Mt. 5:1-12):

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The reason why the poor in spirit are blessed is because they are often humble. Humility is the gentle act of getting oneself out of the center, and inviting God to fill that central place in our lives. A humble person is more apt to put aside his/her own ego needs and listen carefully to others, including God. To listen to others, to listen to God’s voice is a blessing in and of itself because it brings God’s dream closer to reality.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” This blessing does not necessarily refer to those who have just lost a loved one, although hopefully, those who suffer such losses will be nurtured by caring folks. I think Jesus is addressing those who live in a burdensome world where injustice and poverty are part and parcel of the life of a peasant. These are the folks who cry out at indignations caused by the powers of the world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. They have placed their hope in Christ who offers hope to the hopeless, even when the outward signs indicate otherwise. They are blessed by God because they have not yet become cynical but rather keep the dream alive through the public witnessing of their sorrow.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” Folks who are meek are just not valued in our competitive, dog-eat-dog world of ours. But Jesus did not come to support the cultural values of our world. He came to turn them up-side down and encouraged us to do likewise. The meek are blessed because they are content with who they are—no more, no less. When we put aside inflated

images of ourselves and stop striving to impress others, that is the moment we become authentic, finding ourselves at peace in the world, seeking meaning rather than power.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Last weekend, 3 million people turned out for the Women’s Marches all over the world, standing up for human rights and the dignity of every human being. Whatever you may feel about those marches, all of us are called to be a witness to Light. We are called to strive for righteousness, in our government, in our families, and in our personal relationships. Those who have the courage and the willingness to discern and work for right causes, are not only blessed, but they also bless our society.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” Mercy is something that is in short supply today. Mercy is showing compassion or forgiveness towards someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm. Mercy is an act of kindness that springs from a generous heart. When we come face to face with our own suffering and have compassion for ourselves, it becomes easier to have mercy on others who are suffering. I remember being shown mercy after my brother and his wife died, leaving my niece an orphan. Unable to procure the right paperwork, there were bureaucrats who showed mercy on me, taking a personal risk by overlooking the rules and moving my case forward so I could immediately address this difficult situation. Mercy comes from the French word, *merci*, which means *thank you*. I give thanks for all those folks who showed me mercy during a very hard time.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” I think this blessing speaks for itself. A pure heart and a pure mind bring us face to face with the Divine Mystery. Those who are pure in heart keep the dream alive for all of us because they can see the truth clearly and share the truth with love.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” If we keep using violence to address violence, we will just perpetuate the cycle of violence until we have no money or lives left. I believe the human race is smarter than that and we need to use the best minds, the best diplomacy, and the best strategies to deal with the pain in the world. 2700 years ago, Isaiah laid out a vision, supporting God’s dream for a peaceful universe. He spoke of a time when nations would no longer lift up swords against other nations, when the oldest of enemies became the best of friends; when the wolf would live with the lamb, and compassion and generosity became the operating principles. Those who can show others how to cooperate instead of compete or fight, are truly blessed.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” When we are persecuted for standing up for what is right, honorable, and just, it simply means that the truth is too close for comfort for those who walk in the dark. Prophets, whistle blowers, disciples of Christ, and even Jesus himself have been persecuted for shining the light on the truth. Persecution can very be painful and demeaning. But the point here this: These folks are blessed for their sacrificial stance of being bearers of the truth. All of heaven applauds them as well as suffering humanity. So rejoice and be glad, for the kingdom of God has come near.

Today is the annual meeting of the Parish of Trinity Episcopal Church in Sutter Creek. Trinity Church began as a mission in June of 1897. So here we are, 120 years later, a congregation defined by our baptismal vows to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. How do think we have fared so far? Are we promoting God’s dream and blessing those whom Jesus blessed or are we too self-focused, wanting to live in the past rather than going where God is moving today?

At the end of this service, you will be given an annual report, detailing our activities, our finances, and our outreach. I want you to evaluate whether this annual report incorporates God’s dream. Are the details in our plans generous enough? Does what we do bless those whom Jesus blessed? And if not, what changes do we need to make? Each one of you is an important part of the Trinity Family. Your opinion is valued, so please give us feedback. I thank you for your generous giving of time, talent, and treasure that is so vital to the continuation of our ministry in this corner of God’s kingdom. But most important to me is your spiritual and emotional health, a requirement for fully embracing God’s dream for this world. So be a blessing to others. Witness to whatever is right, noble, and just. Don’t allow fear to dampen your love. Let your light shine. And most of all, keep the dream alive! May the blessing of God Almighty, be upon you now and forever. Amen.