

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, September 28, 2025
Saint Michael and All Angels

Solemn Eucharist
11:00 am

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Preston Gonzalez-Grissom

on

Genesis 28:10-17; John 1:47-51

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Sermon for the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels, 2025

I come to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning, I'm going to talk to you about dreams.

And I want you to know this. This is very important. This is not an invitation for everyone to tell me about their dreams after the service.

I have a very strict no -dream interpretation during coffee hour rule, and I intend to keep it.

I'm sure you have very interesting dreams, some of you. And I'm sure some will say that they don't have any dreams at all. But now we know that isn't quite true.

Our brains dream throughout the entire night, and we just forget them whenever we wake. In our Old Testament reading this morning, we find Jacob, who has forgotten his dream. He's forgotten the dream, forgotten God's dream.

See, God's dream, God's plan, has always been for heaven and earth to be one, for human beings to dwell together with God and each other in love. But we sin and reject this dream and reject God and each other in turn, but God loves the world and will not give up on this dream." So he decides the blessing of the world will not be revoked, The dream will not die, instead he blesses Abraham and says, "Through you and your descendants, the entire world will be blessed."

This dream goes through his son, Isaac, and then is supposed to go through his son, Jacob, the younger, not the older. But rather than receiving God's blessing and living God's dream, Jacob deceives his father and on his dying bed and steals his father's blessing calling his older brother Esau to threaten Jacob's life and so he's on the run.

We find Jacob this morning running and eventually his subconscious catches up to him and he lays down to sleep.

As he lays in the middle of nowhere, a rock for a pillow, he has this dream. And in it, heaven is opened up. In a ladder, really a stairway or a ramp comes down from heaven, and angels are ascending and

descending upon it, and God is with him, and God speaks and says, “I will protect you. I will give you the land of promise and through you the world will be blessed.

Through Jacob, the deceiver, through him, and though he is a deceiver, stealing the blessing of his father, and tries to control the dream, the dream is not done. When he wakes, Jacob responds, Surely the Lord is in this place. I just didn’t know it. And Jacob was afraid and says, “How dreadful is this place, and this is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.”

He’s already minimizing the dream. To one geographic location, God’s presence in a new place, but still in One place in one land, this is how our dreams become other people’s nightmares. Rather than living God’s dream, we minimize it. The dream now belongs to a certain group so that as long as this group, this land is safe, protected, and assured, then the dream lives on.

How many atrocities, how many lies have been told with the justification that God is in one place and not another. Jacob says nothing about the blessing being for the world, the entire point, and he will have to wrestle with God before this Jacob, the deceiver, will eventually be renamed Israel.

The verse before our gospel reading this morning, the word about Jesus, the possible Messiah, is beginning to spread and Nathaniel says, “Jesus of Nazareth, does anything good come from Nazareth?”

But Jesus has a bigger thought in mind. He addresses his geographical arrogance, and he reframes the story of Jacob. Did you catch this?

Jesus approaches Nathaniel and says, “Behold, a true Israelite, one in whom there is no guile, no deceit.”

At least Nathaniel was honest.

And yet Nathaniel had no idea where Jesus was going. “How do you know me?” he asks. Jesus replies, “I saw you under the fig tree.”

Scholars don’t seem to know the significance of the fig tree, but Nathaniel blurts out for some reason, “You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.” And we don’t know exactly what causes this reaction, but it seems to me that the most obvious thing is that he was seen.

Jesus says, “I saw you.” And this unmistakably important part of our life with God, our common life together, it’s being seen. And this is what makes Nathaniel believe. And what has made many of us believe and follow Jesus ourselves. But the dream is not that small.

It’s not that limited. It’s not about Nathaniel or about you or me, not only anyway.

If the dream is just about you or me, about being seen, then we will stop once the dream has been secure for us once we feel secure.

No need to focus on what’s happening around the world so long as I have a doorman. I’m safe. It may be sad that others in the city are looking in God -forsaken places for food so long as I have my favorite restaurant and they still carry my favorite dish.

Now I'm not saying any of you are thinking or saying any of this, of course, but this is what happens when we shrink the dream, when our lives with God are just about us.

God's dream has always been bigger. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they are blessed to be a blessing to the world. All the descendants of the world will be blessed through you. Go out to the east and the west to the north and the south.

So Jesus does not seem satisfied Then Nathaniel is seen Instead Jesus says you believe because I saw you under the fig tree You will see greater things than these and maybe you need to hear this this morning. I think that I do.

Sometimes it's hard to believe that better things are actually coming. It's hard to imagine an end of homelessness or loneliness. That peace will actually be brought to those with mental illness or anxiety. I cannot imagine a day when all arms dealers use their steel for plow shares. But this is what Jesus says, "You will see greater things."

And this is not Christian wishful thinking, "Lord, help us." The dream is not an illusion to make us complacent or feel better. It's not just an ancient myth or a pipe dream. It is a certain future. Why? How can we know this?

Notice, if Jesus is referencing Jacob's dream with Nathaniel, he says, "Behold, in Israelite, in whom there is no deceit, you are Jacob."

If Nathaniel is the new Jacob, and the angels are accounted for, they're ascending and Descending where is God and what's the deal with the ramp? Where's the ladder? Where's the staircase?

Jesus doesn't just say you will see greater things than these He says you will see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man upon me It is not an illusion do not minimize the dream. Heaven is open. The dream has come true in your midst. Jesus says, I am the gate of heaven. I am the ladder. I am the ramp. Wherever I am, the presence of God is. You do not have to control the dream to fix every problem, but you definitely should not minimize the dream to only include yourself or your land. Now the dream maker has come. He has come in Jesus Christ and the entire world will be blessed in him. It's not a pipe dream because the dream does not rely on us. It is fulfilled by God and Jesus Christ and he has opened the gates of heaven himself.

Some of you we've already seen in real life. Maybe you've thought of it before, they're just images from our daily life being replayed. And I'm not so sure that this is true. But some of us do need to see someone living the dream before we can learn to dream again. We need to see it.

And the most famous speech on dreams given, obviously, Reverend Dr. King delivers his famous speech during the March on Washington in 1963. His dream is as close as I could ever explain to what God's dream may look like here. But what many do not know is that as the years went by after the speech, Dr. King suffered from what basically every scholar thinks is at least a two -year long depression.

Sparked by the rising war in Vietnam and the Watts riots in 1965, King was suffering a depression because he no longer was sure that love would win. That creative nonviolent resistance and sacrificial love would

defeat white supremacy
in the long list of evils in this world.

King was unsure. That is until April 1968 in Memphis ,old Tennessee. Sanitation workers had been struggling for years to get better working conditions, and finally, tragically, two sanitation workers, Echel, Cole, and Robert Walker were crushed by a malfunctioning truck. 1300 sanitation workers in Memphis went on strike in the city stunk with the reeking smell of white supremacy.

They had asked King to come and help, and he politely declined. But under James Lawson and 150 ministers, they came together, and leaders of the workers began a months -long protest. You may have seen the signs from this protest where they walked down the street with big signs and bold black letter saying, “I am a man.”

Most of them Christians, they saw themselves not just demanding justice or marching for their friends, they were living the future now. They were living God’s dream in real time. This is how they thought of it.

Eventually Lawson asked King one more time to come down, and he did. The National Guard came in and things got ugly. And in the midst of the upheaval, motivated by the workers, King gave what would be his last public speech. In it, he said, we have some difficult days ahead. I may not get there with you, but it doesn’t really matter to me now because I’ve been to the mountaintop. I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people will get to the promised land.

What mountaintop had he been to? What promised land had he seen? What made him dream again? It was the workers in Memphis. It was the then 25 ,000 people banded together in love because they were the greater things.

He saw them and Sometimes in order to dream God’s dream again. We must see others living that reality now our neighbors are looking For mountain tops they want promise land. They are looking for greater things.

I have one friend who says that no one can become a Christian until they see someone who is that they want to be like. Some days you will be living God’s dream and some days you’ll just have to witness it. But may God open our eyes so that we do not control or minimize God’s dream but actually live it.

Amen.
