

“Dreams” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 2 – June 19, 2022

- I. **Galatians 3:28** – ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- II. **In 1993, my hometown in Steamboat, Colorado had a crazy idea.**
 - a. A new bridge was built in town that caused a lot of division.
 - i. The old bridge was simply called the “stock bridge”, which I assume was because of the livestock that would cross over it.
 - b. An idea came up to vote on several names, and as it turns out, someone put “James Brown Soul Center of the Universe Bridge” in the mix.
 - i. Through a community vote that had no official rules, people turned in as many votes as they could... more than 26,000 came in from a community with a population of around 9500.
 - ii. James Brown was the winner by a few hundred votes.
 - c. So, in the summer of 1993, James Brown came to our town, flying in from Georgia to be at the dedication of the James Brown Soul Center of the Universe Bridge.
 - i. Michele and I both went to this event – and it was memorable to see this strange connection of James Brown to our little community.
 - d. It’s interesting, but one thing that stuck with me about this time was that someone defaced the bridge the night before Mr. Brown would come in.
 - i. They spraypainted racial epithets on the pavement and bridge... and it would be too late to clean them off before the ceremony.
 - ii. Mr. Brown was really gracious about it, telling people that he grew up in the south and he had seen this stuff all his life...
 - iii. I felt awful that someone would bring race into the debate – I could understand some of the moral failings of James Brown being an issue... but I couldn’t understand that some people didn’t want a bridge named after a black man.
 - iv. For James Brown, it was just a normal everyday occurrence...which made me feel worse.
- III. **In Galatians, we read Paul’s response to prideful divisions.**
 - a. By the way, isn’t that what racism is all about? Pride?
 - i. When people don’t see others as equal to them, it’s a problem of pride.
 - b. With St. Paul, there is a group of people that are causing some divisions in the churches of Galatia.
 - i. They seem to be teaching that those with a heritage in Abraham... their family tree can be traced back to Abraham... are more pleasing in God’s sight.
 - ii. In addition, they want to reintroduce some of the old Jewish laws and observe the old Jewish feasts as a requirement to be Christian.

1. As an outward sign of being an offspring of Abraham, the non-Jewish men (the Gentiles) were being told to get circumcised.
- c. You see, Paul doesn't want anyone to get the idea that following the Law will somehow set them free with God... but rather it is oppressive and hopeless when there is no Jesus... when there is no Good News.
- d. So, some of the Jewish Christians were setting themselves apart as being superior or better than their Gentile brothers and sisters, based on their pedigree as Abraham's descendants and following the law that Jesus already fulfilled.
- e. Paul has some wonderful words in response... ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:27-29)
- f. In other words, because of faith in Jesus Christ, and our baptisms, we are all equal at the foot of the cross... we share a common ancestry.
- g. Are you following along with the implications of these statements for us in our faith life and in this world today?

IV. **As Christians, we are given the gift of the same Father!**

- a. There is no room for the sin of believing we are better than others when we are all children of the heavenly Father.
- b. I know all these things about racism and what to do about it has become a political issue and even deeply divisive among Christians... but I'm not here with an agenda today... except to turn to God's Word and His agenda
 - i. Frankly, race and ethnicity have nothing to do with God's eternal focus... because people are either spiritually dead without Him, or spiritually alive with faith in Him.
 - ii. Dead or alive... that's it.
 - iii. That's why Jesus says to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) with the word, nations coming from the Greek word, "ethnos" – meaning all ethnicities.
 - iv. It is such a horrible twisting of the Christian spirit and God's will when we have racist attitudes toward each other in any capacity...
- c. I let many of you know that I went through the National Mall in Washington DC when I visited my daughter Alexa and family.
 - i. One of the highlights was standing on the place where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.
 1. When I got home, I read the transcript, of which I have heard and read many times... but each time it wells up tears for me.
 2. When I think about it, the incident with James Brown was almost exactly 30 years from the speech of MLK in 1963.

- ii. I have a dream... that we can live out the meaning of all men are created equal... that sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners can sit down at the table of brotherhood... that my four little children can live in a country where they will “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”... that “little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers”... And that all “God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last.”
- d. Without Jesus, we can never be free, and without Jesus, we cannot come close to the dream of being brothers and sisters regardless of our race.
 - i. That is because God makes us His children in Jesus by faith, and by His grace we all look to Him and say, “we love You Dad.”

V. **Our Father, who art in heaven...**

- a. God the Father is our Father through faith, and it makes us one in spirit too.
 - i. St. Paul writes in Ephesians: “⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call--⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)
 - ii. He also says in Colossians, “¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” (Colossians 3:11)
 - iii. And in Romans: “¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him.” (Rom. 10:12)
- b. In no way can we see others as less than when we read God’s Word and His love for all the people of the world.
- c. And before you walk away from here saying that it might sound good to all be at peace with one another, but getting it done is a whole different matter – there are ways that you can change your own heart.
 - i. In what ways are possible, take some time to get more understanding about people of all different races and backgrounds – especially their challenges and struggles.
 - ii. Look for opportunities to serve in ways that show you care about a person – regardless of race... in fact get to know people from all walks of life wherever possible.
 - iii. Be open to God’s leading when He puts someone in your life who is different – realizing that it’s His way of bringing all people together.
 - iv. Don’t worry about what some people are saying or doing to keep us divided, just remember that we serve a God who connects.

- d. None of can solve these problems alone, but we have a God who is able to transform the hearts and minds of anyone!
- e. It is my prayer that each of our dreams come into alignment with our Father... who knows better than anyone that we are all equal under the cross. Amen.