

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

I recently saw the movie Gracie. Gracie is a teenage girl struggling to be allowed to play soccer at her high school in 1970s New Jersey. But Gracie is no ordinary girl, and the movie is no dull sports flick. While we do see a fair amount of soccer, the realities of tragedy, redemption, sacrifice and healing are what the film is really about. Gracie's quest to play soccer at a time when girls simply did not play soccer is not an easy quest. But as the story unfolds we discover that she is not the kind of person to be fobbed off. In the male dominated world of high school soccer she is exposed to more than just rough and tumble. And yet she keeps going.

As we prepare to baptize baby Campbell into the community of the church I can think of no better heroine and role model to hold before you than Gracie. Gracie is indomitable and persistent. She is also intelligent and emotionally mature. But the reason I like Gracie the most (apart from the fact that she plays soccer rather than, say, baseball or American football) is that she is willing to take flack from her peers for pursuing her own dreams rather than meekly submitting to the desires of others.

Today we are also here to dream. And in baptism and in the renewal of our baptismal vows we hear God's dream and dream God's dream once more. Although our culture tends to view dreamers in a slightly pejorative way, as followers of Christ God asks us to dream of transformation.

There is much about our world that is hard, corrupt, hateful and even death-dealing. From war and environmental devastation to racism and massive economic disparities much is not right in our society. But our task is not to shun the world. God wants us to reshape the world.

There are dreamers who dream because they want to retreat from reality. But then there are dreamers like Martin Luther King or Gracie, dreamers who are not content to simply let things be as they have always been. They are dreamers who have a vision of a better and fairer world, a world in which we can rejoice in differences and celebrate our shared humanity.

When Jesus asked John to baptize him he did something that surprises John and no doubt caused consternation among others. He humbled himself before John. And in doing so, he reminds all of us that participation in baptism levels all distinctions before God. In baptism no one, not even Jesus himself, exercises domination over another. Rather, in baptism each person either makes a promise or in the case of infants like Campbell becomes the recipient of promises made to God.

At the heart of those promises is an orientation towards the future. They remind us that we all have a journey ahead of us. And whether we are just starting, or whether we have been traveling for decades we all have work to do. Every person who is baptized is imperfect. Just as every person who is baptized is part of an imperfect community, the church. But our baptismal promises

remind us that like Gracie we cannot run away from the hard work of transforming our own lives and the lives of others.

It certainly would be much easier not to bother. Just as it would be a lot easier not to bother with the church. But if we do not attend to the promises of baptism we will not flourish as human beings. That is not to say we cannot be successful without the church. In fact, success in the eyes of the church is often failure in the eyes of the world. And often what the world counts as success conceals deeper spiritual failure.

Either way, God has never promised success to those who are baptised. Rather, what God promises to the baptized is a life of struggle. The baptized are called to struggle against evil and intolerance, just as we are called to struggle for justice and peace. Ours is to struggle to see Christ in all people - even those we dislike. And this is to say nothing of the personal struggles that every person who has ever thought seriously about faith must go through.

In fact if you were to concoct an advertising campaign based on our baptismal promise I doubt you would have many takers. Its really not terribly easy or attractive. At the same time, something changes about us in our baptism. No longer are we isolated individuals. Instead we discover what it is like to be part of a wider community that knows no gender, social, geographical, ethnic or national boundaries. And here is the really wonderful part. As members of the church, God asks us to translate our natural human self interest into a collective interest.

No longer are our first thoughts meant to be for our own selves. Instead, our first thoughts are to be for the good of others. And that goes as much for those outside of the church as inside the church.

The shocking thing about God is that God really doesn't do boundaries well. In fact, if God were a therapist God would probably have lost therapeutic credentials millennia ago. For where we like to decide on insiders and outsiders, God is to be found busy destroying the walls and social boundaries that separate humans from one another.

Like Gracie, I don't think God has much time for gender distinctions that privilege one gender over another. And like The Rev Dr Martin Luther King, I don't think God has any time for racial or ethnic judgments that privilege a particular skin color at the expense of others.

God knows we need dreamers like Dr King and Gracie. But God also knows that for those dreams to be made real, we need others to stand alongside them in working towards a better society. Which is why in baptism, God encourages us to stand in solidarity together.

There is a powerful moment in Gracie when a single kick of the ball decides an important match. But while the winning kick comes from one person's foot, without a supportive and encouraging coach, team and family that kick would never have happened. In the same way, while God wants us to flourish as humans we can only do so when we are truly connected to one another.

Epiphany 2 – 13 January 2008 – The Rev. Dr. Guy J.D. Collins

It is impossible to play soccer without teamwork. And it is impossible to be faithful to the dream of God without listening to and learning from others.

At various stages in the life of the church over the last two thousand years we have glimpsed God when we connect with others. Long before the advent of cell phones, instant messaging, Facebook and email, the church has known how important communication is to being truly human. We find God in bread and wine shared together. We find God in gathering to listen to the proclamation of the scriptures. And we find God in caring for others.

Only by gathering insight, challenge, solace and strength from one another can we hope to make good on our baptismal promises. But if we do allow ourselves to discover the divine in one another then we will be able to see the future as a friend and not an enemy. God has always been a good listener. If we can return the favor and listen to God through one another, we all stand a fighting chance of transforming this world for the better. In every dream there is some intersection with reality. Today and always our task is together to discern how we can continue to make God's dream of love real. Amen.