

SERMON

January 4, 2026

“DARE WE DREAM?”

I have been a movie-holic since high school. A friend was also the friend of the son of the manager of downtown Troy’s Proctor theatre. I saw Bathsheba and Cleopatra there. I don’t think the second was biblical, but the appeal was the same.

So, I told you a couple of months ago about my interest in the movie ELEANOR starring June Squibb, 94. The movie didn’t last long in the theaters here. The actress got a shot out of it because now she is hostess of a crime series on ID; the series is called GRANNIES WHO KILL. Don’t tell Betty O’Brien.

While I was visiting my daughters last month in NC, there was a lot of interest in the movie HAMNET. I thought they were saying it was about the actual son of Shakespeare who died from some plague at an early age and then the grieving father wrote Hamlet in tribute to the son. Turns out the movie was based on a work of fiction, though Shakespeare had a child Hamnet who died in childhood.

I had to see it, and it was absolutely gripping, grueling in the portrayal of 16th century childbirth, child health and child death. The mother is present for all that, the father is off for London to a play production. The end is painfully drawn out with a scene from Hamlet. The parents are in the crowd; the child Hamnet appears as from heaven or a cloud and you hear on stage, the line, ‘TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM.’ My brain wants to explode and to scream, “Can you dream while you are living a nightmare?”

Dreams and visions in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures often convey a sense of direction, hope and providence in the worst of times. From the Hebrew prophet Joel, “Your young men will have visions; your old men will dream dreams.”

I jump to the figure of Peter who has an interesting vision or dream at a critical time in the early Jesus movement. The issue of INCLUSION OR INCLUSIVENESS arose early after the crucifixion. Would the Jesus story be just for Jews or for non-Jewish as well? Read from Christian scripture ACTS 10.... In that story, INCLUSIVENESS wins out and the Christian movement grows with Gentiles.

So, Peter has an interesting curriculum vitae: he starts out as a fisherman and one of the original disciples and ends up as the first pope WAY before there is an organized Christianity to be the pope of. Most religions have a mythology and count on most adherents not asking too many questions. I don’t know how well the church that magnified that fisherman got the vision of Acts 10, but a British poet and clergy got in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” If you’ve ever seen an albatross up close, you know they are beautiful.

In the denomination that gave me a career path, Methodist, the national and regional conferences got their blood boiling over the Vietnam War in the 60s and 70s and ended up splitting worldwide over the acceptance of gay people and trans people. I read yesterday there are plenty of evangelical Christian people who think we should erase the gains of the civil rights movement and the progress towards women's equality. And we don't hear much condemnation of white Christian nationalism as an utter betrayal of Christianity and the American dream.

Soon the voice of "I have a dream" will be calling to us again. That voice soared amid race hatred and anti-black violence. And each year we remember the dream came just before the assassination of the dreamer.

Do you remember the dreams that energized you along your path? College was a dream, actually; college and career were dreams because nobody else in my family had done either. The encouragement of many got me to dream but those first dreams were about me. As you get a family, and a community your dream becomes more than about you. Then you want people to find opportunities you will never see because you know you arrived where you in life because somebody cared about you having opportunity.

Even in this small UU congregation we have had people who wanted to enlarge our hearts and our brains and came here to enlarge theirs. We had an Isabel whose faith and outlook took two words, "One world." Not division, not a world of fear and hatred, but "one world". And when leaders met for a brainstorming lunch at Sandhill Cove about 10 or 11 years ago, brainstorming to have a future here, David kept saying "think bigger." A lot of people have thrown in their lot, faith-wise with us to dream, and to keep dreaming alive. That picture board of UU's saints and heroes, WITH TWO AMERICAN PRESIDENTS, both named ADAMS, is an awesome heritage, but in my years here we could fill the whole board with standouts.

The principles on the wall and on the bulletin back keep reminding us to enlarge our dreams. Who are the marginalized and at-risk people in our community? Even if we can't meet the needs of all the people with signs on our corners, the answer is not to force them out of sight. A nation of immigrants cannot shut their doors to new immigrants knocking at our doors. My wife was an immigrant and my father was, I think. He was called Scottie and I never learned if that was the country or a drink.

The principles tell us we have a lot to learn and a lot to protect.

UUs have always sung, "We'll build a land." One thing that means is you can count on UUs to have lots of opinions about what the land should be and offer. But we usually agree, NOT JUST FOR US.

Rev. Bob MacDonald