

EASTER 5C Acts 11, Psalm 148, Revelation 21, John 13 (Notes, not full text) David Schlafer

1) Come along with me on an adventure of imagination—

Fair warning: It will require, as the saying goes, “a willing suspension of disbelief.”

Indeed, it may push your credibility to the breaking point.

But, hey, you look like a bold and agile bunch; so let’s give it a try:

Congressional hearing—Goldman Sachs CEO testifies—I *have an opening statement of 3 brief points:*

1. *We at Goldman Sachs have lost sight of our critical role in fostering a healthy national economy.*
2. *We want to work with Congress to find rules that foster financial fair play/well being for all.*
3. *We are all donating our bonuses to a fund for those who have recently lost homes and jobs.*

2) Are you still with me?—I doubt it! Such an “adventure of imagination” is sheer fantasy.

It *didn’t* happen last week; and it *couldn’t* happen next—for all sorts of reasons:

1. The amassing of acquisitions is almost always addicting.
2. Nobody does a moral about face when subjected to withering attacks (as Goldman Sachs has been).
3. Corporate culture is almost always self-reinforcing and self-justifying.
4. Patterns of business practice develop step by step, over time.

Slowly but surely, money making as a *means* to end becomes an end in *itself*.

Would the Big Boys at Goldman Sachs would repent of all that? *Could they? Dream On!*

3) When the knock comes at the gate of Simon the *Tanner*, what are the chances that Simon *Peter* will happily accompany the waiting delegation from Joppa back to Caesarea—the city of Caesar?

Dream on! It just won’t happen for all kinds of reasons:

1. Peter’s people are an occupied nation—and the oppressors have come begging a favor.
2. They aren’t just Romans, they’re soldiers—the likes of which have just executed Jesus.
3. If Peter *should* join them on long journey back to their home turf, sooner or later, he’s going to have to *eat*—no kosher take outs—and accept Roman hospitality

When he does, they will serve him not just strange fare (okra-eewe!) but forbidden food.

You see, there are certain things that Peter does not eat; *and* he *doesn’t* eat with those who *do* eat such things.

Peter is not a picky eater. His dietary restrictions are a symbol and a seal of his religious community identity.

Initially given by God for hygienic purposes, the dietary prohibitions Peter observes are one bond left between Peter and his people—a bond his oppressors cannot break.

You can force us to pay taxes, you can force us to serve you, you can kill off our kinsmen; but you cannot make us eat your food, or to sit down and eat it with you!

Eat and talk with Roman soldiers? *In your dreams!*

Which is just what Peter has—a *dream*—a dream about *eating*—a *dream* that *changes* his life.

Back on the day of Pentecost, Peter had preached repentance to a multitude.

Now Peter suddenly finds himself practicing what he preaches.

Peter repents—and goes on an *unimaginable journey of the heart* from Joppa to Caesarea.

4) **REPENT!** What does that word mean? It sounds kind of religiously moralistic, doesn’t it?

Self-righteous, even—Like senators giving tongue lashings to the likes of Goldman-Sachs.

Well, to repent does *not* mean, to swallow hard and cringe contritely: *Woe is me! I’m so bad!*

To repent does mean to *change direction*—but not like: *Turning right—oops, no—turning left.*

Repenting means more than merely *changing your mind*—*I said I’ve have cake, but I guess I’ll have pie.*

To repent, one doesn’t just announce: *I have, upon reflection, reached a different decision.*

(Like selecting this car, that house, or the other job—after reassessing all the options.)

And—to repent does not mean *to be beaten into submission by threat, or force of argument*

- 5) None of these get to the heart of what happens to Peter in the dream he has; so what does? New Testament scholar Marcus Borg puts it simply and clearly:
The Greek roots of the word *repent*, Borg says, mean *to go beyond the mind that you have*. That sounds much more interesting than the more conventional connotations of the word. But, when you stop to think about it, if you try to undertake it all by yourself,
to go beyond the mind you have is not just very hard—its impossible.
No matter where you and I go, *there we are*—always in the driver’s seat,
and we always take our minds along for the ride.
The guys at Goldman Sachs have certainly done so.
And there they sit, trapped behind the wheel of their own fancy cars.
To repent, you see, *to go beyond the mind that we have*, is never simply
1. To add to the store of our mental resources.
 2. To undergo an evolution of understanding.
 3. To entertain a series of interesting new options—or even
 4. To find ourselves pushed beyond our comfort zones.
- Going beyond the mind that we have is about being catapulted totally beyond our point of credibility. Have you ever tried to undertake a *self-catapulting*? Good luck!
Next to that, pulling up yourself by your own bootstraps is a piece of cake!
- 6) In going with Roman soldiers from Joppa to Caesarea to talk about Jesus,
Peter ends up going completely beyond the mind that he has.
(Kinda like Goldman Sachs being transformed into a generous charitable non-profit.)
How in the world does such a catapulting transformation happen for Peter?
In the dream he is given, Peter is drawn deftly—dramatically—into the dream of God.
Peter does not self-select a different course of action.
A sheer gift breaks upon him—a totally different way of seeing *what his choices mean*.
All at once, what used to make *no* sense to him at all now makes *perfect* sense—
Indeed—going to meet Roman soldiers as fellow believers—sharing food with them—
sharing in God’s love with them—this is now Peter’s only reasonable course of action.
- 7) When he reports his journey of repentance to his understandably skeptical colleagues,
he says *if God gave them the gifts he has given us, who was I that I should hinder God?*
Those are not the words of a man being dragged kicking and screaming.
Those are the words of a man who has experienced the deep power of full freedom.
Peter cannot coerce his colleagues into his whole new way of seeing
(any more than he himself could have been so coerced).
Peter can only show them—step by step—the dream that has turned his reality upside down.
When his fellow countrymen listen, their first response is silence—disorientation,
as the upside down world they have take for normal turns right side up—just as Peter’s did.
Once they get their bearings, however, all they can do—also like Peter—
is praise God for sweeping them also into a whole new way of looking at life.
- 8) But this is just a Bible story—isn’t that essentially akin to a morally edifying fantasy tale?
Hardly! Have you ever had experiences like Peter’s journey from Joppa to Caesarea—
experiences through which *you* have been *gifted* to go beyond the mind that you had—
where you were *drawn* by God’s *dream* into a totally different way of seeing what’s real?
I’m guessing you *have*. I’ve had such journeys too. Let me share one briefly, so that,
in listening to *that* with *one* ear, you can, with the *other*, hear your *own* repentance tale again.

- I grew up in a denomination where women were not ordained. It wasn't so much that it was *wrong*; but that it was utterly inconceivable—no one would have *dreamed* of doing such a thing.
- I came into this denomination just after the ordination of women had been approved, but was still hotly debated. It felt like I'd been adopted into a family where the biological siblings were always squabbling over what was not my fight.
- I was asked by two former students to perform their marriage—held at a church where the associate rector was a woman. Joy Rogers was an intelligent, funny, graceful host. I HEARD myself suggesting that we share the service. The gift of her way of embodying priesthood simply settled the issue for me, once and for all—no arguments needed.
- I then returned to my seminary, where some of my women students asked for help in being exposed to women in ministry. We built an elective course: *Theology and Priesthood: Visions and Voices of Women*, and invited a series of guest speakers-- women with distinguished credentials as priests and theologians. (It was a fabulous course!)
- Someone photocopied the syllabus and sent it in plain brown envelopes to all the conservative trustees—it got ugly!
- It wasn't *personal*, however—a majority of the faculty were in solidarity – and 8 of 13 of us were gone by the next year.
- One day, at a conference in St. Louis, I was fretting over my future, when down the street walked Joan Delaplaine.
- Joan is a Dominican nun, who headed the preaching program at the Aquinas institute, who knows she is called to priesthood in the Roman Catholic church, knows it won't happen in her lifetime, but has chosen to bear witness to her call within her own tradition. (A close friend now, but only a acquaintance then.)
- When I saw her on the street, I heard myself saying to myself: *If God can give Joan the grace to stand as she has, my colleagues and I can trust that God will get us through this with similar grace.* (And, of course, God has.)

What have been, for you, experiences of analogous repenting, in which God, through sheer grace, has brought you “beyond the mind that you had”?

We need sacred space for the sharing of such experiences—I would love to hear some of yours.

- 9) These catapulting experiences of going beyond the mind that we have place us firmly within the broad, breathtaking sweep of sacred history—of divine/human encounter.

The Holy Scriptures are a tapestry of divine dream work—

A treasury of accounts that depict, deftly, dramatically, decisively,

the myriad ways in which God graces God's people with new and freeing ways of seeing—ways that empower them to go beyond the minds that they have.

Today's lessons are bursting with vivid examples—

divine dreams first unfolded *then and there* with dramatic implications for *here and now*:

- To his disciples, in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks about Glory, Love, and a New Commandment. The “glory” described here is not Hollywood glitz or Washington DC grandeur. It is *distinctive character, graphically displayed*.
By pouring himself in selfless love into the Son, the Father's “true colors” are clearly seen.
By pouring himself in selfless love into the Father, the Son's “true colors” are vividly shown.
By pouring himself in selfless love into the disciples, Jesus shows the “true colors” of both.
By pouring themselves in selfless love into one another, the disciples will mirror those colors also.
The commandment is “new” because it is not laid down, but released in full freedom,
As the disciples are empowered to go beyond the mind that they have.
Imagine, just imagine what might happen when that dream breaks over not just Goldman-Sachs or Wall Street:
but the whole capitalist economy—
Imagine a capitalism driven not by competition and consumerism,
but by consideration for the concerns of every citizen
and particular compassion for those who are deeply in need.
- The psalmist today sings a dream of all nature's creatures praising God.
When the psalmists dream finally takes hold, and God's name only is exalted,
energy policy will *honor* the praise that comes from all of earth's creatures,
rather than threatening their lives on Gulf Coast beaches.

- *Then I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. "In your dreams, John!"* Well, maybe.

But just last week a large group of us sat downstairs transfixed,
as Daoud Nassar described the work of the Tent of Nations—
a community of radical peace makers planted in the midst of hostility—
right in the middle of the West Bank (not very far from Jerusalem)

10) Like Peter, you and I can never predict (let alone control) the divine dream incursions that take us beyond the mind that we have. But we can anticipate them and prepare for them.

Peter, feeling his way into Easter, has:

- Preached, at Pentecost, to his countrymen “from every nation under heaven”.
- He has just brought God’s healing to a man and a woman who are Greek
- He is now staying at the home of a *tanner*
- He’s not just waiting for a long delayed lunch, he is fasting—asking *Now what, God?*}

That is a prayer God usually answers. . . .

When Peter’s colleagues hear where God’s dream has led Peter, they conclude:

Then God has given the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.

May God grant us, our church, our nation such Easter repentance,

A repentance that catapults us beyond the mind that we have.