Dreams are important to me. I won’t be presumptuous enough to say that dreams are important to all of us, because I can quote plenty of others who’ll say that for me. Here’s a few lines from an article on the Tufts University website, *TuftsNow*:

Lots of theories have been offered: dreams are used to regulate emotion, like dealing with fears; to consolidate memory, replaying things from your day to help remember them; to solve, or on the other hand to forget, real-world problems. Another theory suggests they help the brain predict its own future states.”

And that article by Erik Hoel, “A New Theory on Why We Dream,” suggests that dreaming is a way of “breaking the cycle of repetitive daily tasks—filling out spreadsheets, delivering mail, tightening pipe fittings—with an infusion of discord, keeping our brains fit.”

My point here is that there is an abundance of information and speculation about dreams right now, in the twenty-first century.

Even if we take the most arid view, that dreams are random electrical discharges in our brains while we sleep, we’re left with questions about why these *particular* memories, images, situations, and characters present themselves and why we sometimes awake to intense feelings. Even if these feelings, too, can be explained as electrical impulses, so can feelings of love and even spiritual connectedness, so that explanation is no end in itself.

Dreams show up repeatedly in Holy Scripture. Major decisions are made on the basis of interpretations of them, people (“seers”) are occasionally put to death for “false” interpretations (usually meaning something unflattering to the dreamer).

Freud and Jung, taking different approaches, focused much of their attention and theories on dream imagery.

Dreams, we can safely say, are a big deal to us humans generally. I have a shelf full of journals in which I’ve recorded most of my dreams—the ones I’ve remembered, of course. That’s one of the pesky things about dreams: in site of being so important, they are terribly ephemeral. Even if you don’t set much store by your dreams, I can guess that you’ve had at least a few that seemed vivid and memorable when you awakened, only to vanish entirely within minutes.

There is widespread agreement that dreaming is essential to our well-being, whether we remember them or not.

As I was writing this I thought, “Wow! That is a *lot* to have come from half a verse in a short psalm:” “Then were we like those who dream.” The psalmist doesn’t set up cause-and-effect here, but merely writes, “*When* the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, *then* were we like those who dream.” Correlation, perhaps, rather than causation.

So, in this context of dreams, let’s imagine together for a moment. It sounds like this poet/story-teller is at least *implying*, if not saying outright, that while those fortunes were in flux, or lost altogether, the psalmist’s community were like those who do *not* dream.

In another sermon, or if I were simply a more accomplished Biblical scholar, I might talk about the specific fortunes that were lost and then restored.

But my ignorance might be an asset in this particular go-round. Because for our purposes today those details don’t really matter. Why? Because we all know what it’s like to suffer reversal of fortunes. Every one of us has lost something or someone precious to us. You might be in the midst of such a loss right now. Each of us knows, too, that we made it through those reversals somehow.

None of us—as far as I’m aware—has experienced what Bartimaeus did, the loss of sight and having it restored. *That* is dramatic.

On the other hand all of us here know what it’s like to have something we hold dear denied us: that simple, potent experience of coming together in church and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

And yet, here we are together. Perhaps as those who dream. One thing that might mean for us—as it certainly did for Bartimaeus—is that the anxiety and worry we focused on the thing we lost or feared losing have been released. The energy we had spent in loss or mourning has been freed from its narrow concerns. Now we can be like those who dream.

Obviously I’m no longer speaking about the pandemic. I for one can be held hostage by the most mundane concerns—changing accounts and bill-paying from one bank to another, as we’ve been doing recently; worrying about something I did or said in a meeting (or a sermon); obsessing in general. When I decide that enough’s enough, that I don’t need to worry about *that* issue any more, or I’ve done everything I could do, then my fortunes are restored, in the psalmist’s phrase. And it’s really not so much my deciding as it is that I’ve been liberated from . . . what? . . . my critical/judgmental self. It might feel like I’ve simply run out of steam on a particular issue. Whatever it is, it often feels like God has lifted the weight from my shoulders.

No big feat for the all-mighty, all-knowing Creator of all that ever has been. But a monumental relief for my cramped little psyche. *Then*, again, am I like those who dream.

I’m not a big fan of today’s passage from Hebrews, even though I understand the author’s purpose to appeal to fellow Jews who are well-versed in the language of sacrifice and high priesthood. But the line “separated from sinners” to describe Jesus puts my teeth on edge.

I prefer reflecting on Jesus the rabbi, the priest, the human being, who lamented over those who were lost, who had compassion on the blind man in a time when blindness or any infirmity was seen as proof of sin, who felt the anguish expressed in “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The Jesus who was surrounded by a crush of people who were ill and sinful and needy in so many ways and who knew the human dilemma from the inside out. That Jesus, whose liberation came at the highest cost and was not merely for himself but for all of us, so that our fortunes can be restored, so that we can be, once again, like those who dream. + + +