



I was struck this week by some memories coming back of college. In particular, my freshman year of college, I was at a party, it's college, and it was thrown by two of the sophomores in my program. Now, it was a small program, so a lot of us were there, high percentage. And I'll never forget when one of the hosts turned to me and she asked me, "So are you gay?" I mean, good Lord. Now, I had come out to a few people in high school, including my loving family, for which I'm always grateful. So it wasn't a huge secret, but it was Cincinnati. It was the 90s, and I was holding it a little closer to the vest than maybe I should have, just trying to feel it out. Now, I was at a music conservatory at the time in the musical theater program.

So I don't know how much danger I was really in in the moment. And that was when my classmate asked me and I fessed up and I came out to my college class. Now, the two women renting the apartment as it would turn out, both went on to the Broadway production of *Wicked*. Yeah, one went from Broadway actually to the national tour and played Elphaba in the national tour, and another played Elphaba on Broadway, these roommates. So I came out to not just one, but two Elphabas. I tell you this first because you should know that your minister has the gayest coming out story in history.

Sorry. Second, if you have no idea what an Elphaba is, I don't know what to tell you, but you may not enjoy the rest of this sermon. You go make some crafts with the children. And third, I tell you this because dreams matter. Okay? This morning we lit the first of the wreath, we sang the Christmas doxology, I put on my green Stole for You, and we began the season of Advent. Advent is a season that comes from the Christian tradition, and in many churches it marks the beginning of the liturgical year. This is the beginning of the year for folks. In Latin, advent means to draw near or to arrive, and that's what we sing. We sing, "Oh, come, oh, come Emmanuel," which means God among us, love

among us. And when I was reading about this, I saw it also means to come to and for a moment I thought that meant like come to out of a drunken stupor or something, which if you've been alive for the last four weeks, is a perfectly acceptable state of being... to be in.

No judgment here. Like many traditions, Advent pulls from communities of faith that predate Christianity by some measure and also has regional differences around the world. In Australia, they're not in the snow during Christmas, they're surfing. And just a few centuries ago, actually, the church used to celebrate Advent as a fast, but they got a little concerned that they were fasting twice with Lent and Advent. So they sort of changed their minds. So people stopped fasting in this season and in my case, did the absolute opposite. Exactly. So even the Advent wreath as we have here, was only created in the 19th century. It was created by a German clergy person because the children at the school where he served needed some kind of engagement with the days leading up to Christmas. So there's a lot about this period, this season that if you pick at it enough doesn't make a whole lot of actual sense.

It's almost as if it's been dreamed up a little, and that is fitting in this time because the stories that we tell at this time that are retold at this time of year are stories about dreams. Some are waking visions, others are characters in their sleep having these ideas. But many of the stories told now they embrace dreams and celebrate how those dreams meld and merge into how we choose to live our lives. For many of us, the entirety of these stories that we hear at these times are fiction or a retelling of stories and familiar themes from time out of mind, parents concerned with the arrival of a child and how that child will grow. Will it be happy? Can I care for it? Fear about the life of that child, both by its parents and by authorities who have had dreams that this child will pose a threat to the empires they hope to build.

Yeah, shared themes and these stories about dreams are eternal somehow, especially in the way that worry plays a role in them. In fact, a massive long-range study of sleeping dreams, including those recorded in antiquity, found that about 80% of dreams focus on one thing, anxiety, worry. I think for some of us, only 80% would be kind of an improvement right now. But some people who study dreams have found that shared themes and elements in them from millennia, they have found these, but not just anxiety.

People who study dreams agree on one thing, that dreams have suffered a serious setback in recent decades. They used to be such a huge part of people's faith lives. People would build special beds near altars to have dreams that would inspire their future doings. The oldest continuous religion, religious faith on the planet, the Hindu faith believes there are three states of consciousness, waking, sleeping, and dreaming. It's really part of the faith, part of the life. Only a century ago, Freud and Jung used dreams as experiences to be considered, to be discussed, to be used as impulses for the actual actions we are going to take in our lives. But dreams have had a rough go of it lately right?

Thank you. Some of what we call reality today has all of our attention, all of our time. We're told as grown-ups that dreaming is bad or that it's useless. Get your head out the clouds, wake up. Oh, those are just dreams. You've got to live in reality or here live in reality, but also read this book about aliens

and then go see this movie about singing, acting, joyful, dancing witches, but live in reality. It's good. All this focus on reality only makes us thirsty, I think for more fantasy, for more of the waking dreams that are before us today. I think dreams need a comeback. Literally from our first birthday, what are we told about wishes?

Don't say them out loud because they might not come true. What is that? I don't know why I'm this about wishing today, but it doesn't make any sense to keep the thing that we want with the people that we love the most, our friends and our family gathered around us at this most important time all to ourselves because it won't come true. I am not down with that. It's a conspiracy against dreaming, I tell you. And thank goodness for poets though. Our readings today are by Lucille Clifton. She grew up in the Buffalo, New York area and is someone who lived there. All they got is dreams to get them through, friends I got to say. I can say that I was there. Don't take that away from them.

Clifton's work was first published in a debut book called *Good Times* in 1969. She remains the only poet to have two books in the same year nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Langston Hughes published more than a dozen of her poems in 1970 in an anthology he composed with poems of the great and upcoming black authors and her career took off from there for the rest of her life. She became one of the most acclaimed poets in the world, and many of her poems are about dreams. She says, "What I pleaded with her, could I do? Oh, what could I have done? And she twisted her wild hair. She sparked her wild eyes and screamed as long as I could hear her."

This, this, this. The image at the end of that poem, pleading with a friend, wild hair, wild eyes and screaming about what more must be done, does that sound like an important part of a story or a play that's a little popular right now that we've heard of? Or maybe it could just sound like any one of us in any given moment in our kitchen running around, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do," which is also okay. What could I have done? And to hear back this, this, this. It's an important question. Its answers though... its answers are the beginning of a vision, beginning of prophecy, of dreams. They are advent questions, the coming to questions.

Advent or just this cusp of the seasons that we're in, is a time for the permission of visions, the allowing of dreams, the kindling I dare say in this time of much needed hope, of prophecies, even of wishes. Because wishes, all of these things are the seeds. They're the seeds of what can grow and bloom to be or to put it how another witch from another musical night, careful the wish you make, wishes are children. They leave me alone one Sunday and I gay up the whole joint.

So while I'm at it, Marcel Proust, the famously homosexual writer who also wrote the longest work of fiction in recorded history, including the Bible... Sorry. You guys are the best, tells us this about dreams. I quote, "When the mind has a tendency to dream, it is a mistake to keep dreams away from it, to ration its dreams. So long as you distract your mind from its dreams, it will not know them for what they are. You will always be being taken in by the appearance of things because you will not have grasped their true nature. If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less, but to dream more, to dream all the time." This is written by a person who spent their life mostly in one

room, in one bed, yet dreamed of a world of such marvelous beauty and intricacy that he needed to fill seven volumes and use more than a million words to describe his vision of it.

The beauty that he saw in it. If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more to dream all the time. But that is not what many of us do. Instead, right now, many of us following what we feel is a political setback or anxiety about the world and its shape right now, reading op-eds and articles that talk about retreating from dreams right now. They say we need to get more of the facts. Now, I'm very pro-fact. I looked up the word count of Proust and the Bible for all of you today. Pro-fact. But some of the conversations I hear, some of these articles I'm reading and seeing, they make me a little nervous, I got to say, because the dreams they're talking about retreating from go by another name, someone's civil rights. Someone's human rights. My human rights. Your human rights right? I hear the murmurs about the losing strategy of advocating for trans whites, advocating against war crimes against children, advocating for free and unfettered access to reproductive healthcare and how these ideas all came together to sound too extreme.

But these strategies, these ideas, these are not advent thoughts, friends. We've got to walk back out of the haze. We've got to be cautious of any pragmatism that would barter inalienable human rights in the trade right? We have got to hold to the sacred way our faith calls us to dream of our freedom being everyone's freedom or else it's not freedom right? The way we dream of our freedom, we must also dream of our neighbor's freedom for they are one and the same. They are linked together forever. In these fears, there might lie some political truth. I get it, that's true. But dreams are not for strategy. Dreams are not for political gain. Dreams are spoken to ourselves and to those we care for, to strengthen our faith, to power our conviction, and to feel the deepest truths we have to share with one another.

Now is time for more dreaming friends, for sharing the dreams we have and not worrying immediately about how we're just going to make them true right away. We've got to dream. I have a dream myself actually, one where all churches do not stop advocating for the dignity and security of gay and trans people. Do not stop advocating for ceasing the killing and capture and children as a tool of war. Do not stop advocating for bodily autonomy and the tenets of reproductive justice in this world. Do not stop advocating for public education to be free from favoring one religion over another. Do not stop and will not stop and cannot stop privileging the voice of women in its worship, in its leadership and in its national presence right?

Oh, but you're being political T. J. All right, fine. These aren't political talking points, friends. These are people's rights. These are people's lives. This is my life. This is your life. There is so much of this dream alive here. And I, for one will speak that dream, will sing that dream, will live that dream of freedom at last for all with every cell of my body until I can't blow candles out at my party anymore. When I was at that party with the two witches, we were all just little dreamers then. I don't think they had any idea they'd go on to be stars. Most of us were just wondering if we could feed ourselves as actors. Clearly not. Here I am.

But ask any artist. Ask any artist about the power of dreams and then ask them how important it is to listen to other artists' dreams and to hold them so gently. I felt that kind of care that night. I won't forget the way they spoke to me, these two witches, the way they asked if I was gay, it was all in the way they asked the question, a question that could mean danger in so many places then. I could see that they hoped I'd say yes and that I'd be okay and that I'd be safe. They were like... In my entire life up until that point, I'd never experienced that kind of hope in that question, that sense that my answer of yes would be what they were dreaming I'd say. And the mix of delight and glee when I answered was so lovely. But even more lovely was just moving on to the next topic of conversation. No big deal. That's it. And that is what I felt there. It was a relief, the likes of which I had never known before.

Sometimes in this story and in some of those I've seen on screen and stage, I start to wonder if witches are just people who can see and tell the truth no matter what the cost and who can hear the truth of others with no judgment. And if that is what a witch is in the days, in the weeks, in the months, in the years to come, we might all need to turn into some pretty big bad witches ourselves. I have moved my pages to where they're supposed to be now. It feels, I know that a lot is demanding our focus right now. It may feel like 80% of your time is in anxiety or maybe that that is an improvement. But if that is the case, we dream more, not less and pay attention to the sacred garden of your dreams, friends. Pay attention to the gardens of your hopes. Restrain yourself from jumping to solutions or to constructions. Focus on the seeds of wisdom that lay in your dreams, friends. Write them down. Share them with your friends or with your family or with your friendly neighborhood witch.

We're easy to spot. We wear big black capes. So if you care to find me, look toward the western sky. I'm told every dream deserves the chance to fly right? Lucille Clifton tells us this. She said in an interview just kind of off the top of her head, she goes, "Courage is to walk out on your fear, to take risk and just walk out on your fear." I love that image and y'all, if life in the company of witches has taught me anything, it's this. That risk is a dream that takes wing and courage is the gale that will guide you. I will never forget that understanding of those two witches at that time. May we all dream such dreams, friends that would soar high above this land, that would strike love into the hearts of the world defying gravity at least for a time. May it ever be so, blessed be and amen.