



Dreams

Genesis 37:17-27

January 14th, 2018

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

Text:

They (Joseph's brothers) said to one another, "Here comes that dreamer. Come, let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits." (19b-20a)

Joseph was a dreamer. He was not a very discreet dreamer! He shared his dreams, perhaps, too freely, especially with his family.

In the Old Testament God often spoke through dreams and visions. Dreams and visions are those "thin places" where heaven and earth touch, where the Eternal and the Temporal become tangent. The difference between dreams and visions is essentially one of semantics; dreams occur when the person is asleep and visions occur when awake and in a "trancelike" state.

If you have seen the musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" then you know that Joseph's dreams did not set well with his brothers. His dream pointed to a different future than the one they anticipated; a future in which the younger would supplant the elder and the least would become the first while the first became the least. It is eerily similar to Mary "magnificat" found in Luke's gospel.

As today's reading opened, Joseph's father Jacob sent him to find his brothers and give them a message. His brothers were not where anyone suspected. They moved the family's flock to better pastures. When they saw him coming toward them, one of the brothers said to the others,

"Here comes that dreamer. Come, let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits."

You see, the world really doesn't like dreamers

for dreamers upset the apple cart.

They disrupt the status quo.

Now,

while the status quo may not be good,

at least everyone know their place!

This is the natural order of things.

All things,

whether animal or plant,

seek a stabilizing balance.

This balance is called

homeostasis.

But that is not how God's Kingdom works.

From the Old Testament prophets
to the New Testament epistles and the letters of Paul,
to the final book of the New Testament,
Revelation--
(please don't call it "revelations"
because there is only ONE
revelation,
namely,
God's in charge;
God's the Boss!)

God is constantly declaring
in one form or another,
"Behold, I am doing a new thing."¹

On August 28, 1963

a podium was set up at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C.

A crowd of about a quarter of a million gathered in that hot muggy August, D. C. sun.

This was before social media.

People of all races gathered
having arrived by bus
car,
and even hitch-hiking.

They were about to hear what has been called
"one of the most significant speeches in the 20 century.

Like Lincoln's Gettysburg Address,
the speech was relatively short,
around 17 minutes.

It was given by a black baptist preacher named Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King was on the F.B.I.'s "subversive character list.
Many called him an outside agitator.

As Dr. King stood up to speak he clutched a manuscript
written in his own hand.

¹ E.g. Isaiah 43:18-19, 65:17; Ephesians 2:15, 4:24; Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 21: 5, et al

Usually he spoke extemporaneously,
but he knew that this was an occasion for thoughtfulness
and carefully chosen words.

Yet, the speech didn't seem to jell.

Every preacher knows the feeling;
you work hard on a sermon,
carefully select the words
and your realize that it is falling flat!

There have been times in my ministry when I just wanted to stop a sermon in the middle
and apologize to the congregation because even I'm bored with the sermon.

There have been times when I just wanted to stop,
see if anyone noticed,
and go right into the final hymn.

There have been times when as I sit down the Holy Spirit hits me upside the head
and says,
"You fool! That's not what this text is about?"

Well, Dr. King was having one of those moments.

Sitting behind him was a well known gospel singer named Mahalia Jackson.

She knew that Dr. King's speech was "flat"
Recalling a sermon that he first delivered at a high school in
Rocky Mount, North Carolina
and then again only a few weeks earlier in Detroit,
she called out to him;

"Tell them about the dream, Martin.
Tell them about the dream."

So he put his notes aside
and spoke of his dream.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will be judged not
by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Riffing upon the vision of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah,
words that are associated with the season of Advent,
Dr. King tied his dream to God's dream.

“I have a dream that one day every valley shall be made exalted,
every hill and mountain shall be made low,
the rough places made plain,
the crooked places straight,
and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together.”

Not everyone liked the dream.

With in five years he was slain on the balcony in Memphis, Tennessee.

As I said,

Joseph was a dreamer.

Not everyone liked the dream.

His brothers plotted to kill him

hoping to bury the dream with his body.

The same thing happened to Jesus.

Bury the man,

kill the dream.

Dreamers make the powerful uncomfortable.

As a consequence,

those who fear the dream,

the change encased in the dream,

often resort to desperate means

to achieve desperate ends.

Jim Wallis,²

a conservative Christian minister and social gospel activist,

once reflected on Dr. King’s “Dream” speech.

He realized that there was something missing from the speech;

it didn’t focus on a “complaint”

even though black Americans in 1963 had much to complain about.

Dr. King’s is “I Have a Dream” not an

“I Have a Complaint” speech.

Complaints are not a foundation for either

change

nor the Kingdom of God.

² *Homiletics, January/February, 2018, v. 30, Number 1*

But DREAMS are
a foundation for both.

As the Rev. Wallis ³ wrote:

“Just saying what is wrong will never be enough to change the world.
You have to lift up a vision of what is right.”

We need more dreamers
and fewer complainers.

We are bombarded with complainers;
television and print news,
commentators and pundits,

the world is full of complainers.

Frankly, it is wearing us out,
tearing up apart,
and dividing us into tribes
besides being toxic to the soul.

A culture of complaint never built anything
but it has destroyed much;
individuals,
families,
schools,
churches,
businesses,
communities,
cities,
and nations.

Dreamers are not naive.
They know how bad things are,
but they also know how good things can be, too.

We need,
indeed the world needs,
dreamers who can outline in concrete ways,
small incremental ways,
how we can be labors in the vineyard of God's Kingdom here on earth.

³ *ibid.*

T. S. Lawrence ⁴,
who is better known as “Lawrence of Arabia”
once said that all people dream,
but not all people dream equally.

“Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds awake to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous (because) they may act on their dreams with eyes open to make it possible.”

Dreamers refuse to accept the cynicism of the old French proverb that says, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Margaret Mead ⁵ once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Joseph's dreams did not die in the pit. Through his unshakable trust in
God's Providence

and the circumstances of his life,
his dreams were just starting to come into fruition.

The dream continues.

Thy Kingdom come,
on earth,
as it is in heaven.

To God be the glory.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*