

“Dreamers”

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Gen. 37:1-4, 12-28

Matt. 24:1-14

“They said to one another,

‘Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him...’

Gen. 37:19-20a

Let us pray... O God,

Inspire us with visions of hope to lead us through dark realities
to discover bright possibilities.

Amen

Did you ever wonder where religion come from?

As an ordained ‘Minister of the Word’, I’ve got my theories.

One idea is that religions come about as a collaboration between
right-brained and left-brained people.

Spirituality is a different – though it is part of the process,
coming as an experience of the holy

from the *outside*, *in* to a person’s heart
and from the *inside*, *out* to others.

Someone has a spiritual experience that they describe as
a vision, a dream, a voice, an idea

like it happened for Moses kneeling by the burning bush,

Jesus praying on a mountain-top, Mohammed meditating in a cave.

And that experience gets interpreted by right-brained folks

who put it in the form of a story, a song, a poem, a prayer

borrowing here and there, adding, subtracting,
editing as they go along.

And then all that material gets organized by left-brained folks
deciding what gets in the box called “The Right Way”
and... what doesn’t make the cut.

And that’s so there is some manageable way of passing traditions on
to the next generation – as well as providing a way
to tell the difference between Us and Them,

though some people think that’s the only reason.

Then someone else has a spiritual experience

and it starts all over again to make something new –
or to reform something old.

But always seeking to reconnect people with God and one another.

Willard, p.2

When we step out of the rut of that road called,
 "We've always done it This Way", it can put us into dangerous territory.
There is always going to be somebody who gets nervous
 about the threat that change brings to upset the balance of power.
Then, they say to one another,
 'Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him...',
 that is, to kill the dream.
But we have to hang onto our dreams – our hopes for what yet can be.

Think how Joseph was separated from his father
 by the ill will of his brothers – except for Reuben,
 and then, abducted by nomads to be sold to Arab traders.
He could have been lost forever,
 yet he remained faithful in this situation.
He listened to his dreams and interpreted them faithfully
 which provided him with a way through as we shall see.
 towards an unexpected good outcome.

Joseph's visions were not always pleasant,
 and neither was the one Jesus shared with his disciples
 predicting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.
Jesus' apocalyptic vision –
 such that "ethnic group will rise up against ethnic group",
 while there are "famines and earthquakes everywhere"
 could find parallels with events in our own time.
Economic woes are not named specifically,
 but the blame game of "betraying" and "hating one another"
 is part of the nightmare.

Yet in this dark vision, there is also the breaking light of hope
 that these events are but the 'birth pangs' for a better world yet to come.
 and that the end of what had been
 would give way to the beginning of something new
 to reconnect with what – or rather Who, has always been there.
and for us that is God in Christ.

Could 1st Century people have anticipated what the world has become?
 Can we anticipate what is yet ahead?
Yesterday at our 1st Family Fun Fest, many remarkable things happened –
 we saw visions...

Willard, p.3

We saw teenagers doing a skit right here in this sanctuary.

We saw children baptizing our entryway with water balloons.

And a young person wrote in stretchchalk that a better world
'starts with you'.

Afterwards, some of the leaders of our church met with the teens
to plan a "youth group" we expect to begin in September.

This will also involve forming our first confirmation class
to open up that "Box of the Right Way" to see what's in there
and what still applies to be used to form a cohesive group
just as Christian communities have formed throughout the centuries –
and just as this church was formed 8 years ago.

We will be setting in motion something new that will bring us in touch
with what or Who has always been there –

our God in Christ through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

And we can't necessarily anticipate the good that will yet unfold –
we have to trust the vision.

I had a nice surprise last week, when I received an invitation
to join someone on their Facebook page.

It was from a young man who I worked with many years ago in NJ
when he was a little boy.

A handicapped member of a church I was serving then
used to get help from her neighbor, David, who was about 10 at the time
He would push her wheelchair to church on Sunday
and bring her back to her apartment around the corner.

I led a Biblical storytelling class about 'the Prodigal Son' –
and this boy and his sister attended and performed that parable
as a rap song, in tandem – taking turns, singing the story.

David Smith was a great kid then who came from a solid 'Christian' family –
his father worked two jobs, mother staying at home
with his older sister, brother, and two younger sisters.

David was also an artist and participated in an art program for city children
at the senior citizen center.

I moved away, but would check in with David over the years
when I was home for a visit.

Willard, p.4

When I was home for the Plainfield Outdoor Art Festival to do caricatures,
I made a point to see how David was doing.
By then, he was a high school student and I asked him about his artwork.

He showed me a drawing of a face that was just eyes, mouth, and a tear –
at that time in his life, a teacher and some of the kids were
really down on him, giving him a hard time.
So, that drawing was a self portrait.

I told him I was there for the art show and invited him to come out
and share my space if he wanted to draw.
By the end of the week, he had drawn a picture of the Disney character,
Lion King, jubilant, courageous, confident!
And he came to the art show with his brother to sell
11 x 17 photocopies of his 'Lion King' for a dollar apiece.

These days, David is teaching photography at a high school in north Georgia
where he is married and has two children of his own.
He was just like some of those kids that some of you have met
when you volunteered as tutors in Wildwood,
and like kids Mike West will meet when he starts teaching,
and like the young people we will meet in our ministry here
who will need a word of encouragement and active concern –
even a push to pursue their dreams.

Why can't it be a better world?

Why can't there be enough food, clothing, and shelter for everyone?
Why can't we respect one another's interpretations of the holy –
and trust that such respect will be returned?

A better world starts with youth and it starts with you.

Amen

*Our lesson from Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 tells the beginning
of the story about Joseph who was the eleventh son of Jacob.
Jacob loved Joseph more than all his brothers
and gave him a 'coat of many colors' –
which is called the 'Technicolor Dreamcoat' in a modern musical.
Joseph had a special gift for dreaming prophetic dreams
and his brothers were jealous of him...*

37 Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien,
the land of Canaan. ²This is the story of the family of Jacob.
Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers;
he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives;
and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children,
because he was the son of his old age;
and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.

But when his brothers saw that their father loved him
more than all his brothers, they hated him,
and could not speak peaceably to him.

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.

¹³And Israel said to Joseph,
'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem?
Come, I will send you to them.'

He answered,
'Here I am.'

¹⁴So he said to him,
'Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock;
and bring word back to me.'
So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem,
¹⁵and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him,
'What are you seeking?' ¹

¹⁶'I am seeking my brothers,' he said;
'tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.'

¹⁷The man said,
'They have gone away, for I heard them say,
"Let us go to Dothan."'

So Joseph went after his brothers,
and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them,
they conspired to kill him.

¹⁹They said to one another,
'Here comes this dreamer.'

²⁰Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits;
then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him,
and we shall see what will become of his dreams.’

²¹But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying,
‘Let us not take his life.’

²²Reuben said to them,
‘Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness,
but lay no hand on him’—
that he might rescue him out of their hand
and restore him to his father.

²³So when Joseph came to his brothers,
they stripped him of his robe,
the long robe with sleeves that he wore;
²⁴and they took him and threw him into a pit.
The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵Then they sat down to eat;
and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead,
with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin,
on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers,
‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?
²⁷Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites,
and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother,
our own flesh.’

And his brothers agreed.

²⁸When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up,
lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites
for twenty pieces of silver.
And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Matt. 24.1-14

24:1 As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away,
his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

²Then he asked them,
'You see all these, do you not?

Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another;
all will be thrown down.'

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives,
the disciples came to him privately, saying,
'Tell us, when will this be,
and what will be the sign of your coming
and of the end of the age?'

⁴Jesus answered them,
'Beware that no one leads you astray.

⁵For many will come in my name, saying,
"I am the Messiah!"
and they will lead many astray.

⁶And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars;
see that you are not alarmed;
for this must take place, but the end is not yet.

⁷For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,
and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places:
⁸all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

⁹ 'Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death,
and you will be hated by all nations because of my name.

¹⁰Then many will fall away,
and they will betray one another and hate one another.

¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.

¹²And because of the increase of lawlessness,
the love of many will grow cold.

¹³But anyone who endures to the end will be saved.

¹⁴And this good news of the kingdom
will be proclaimed throughout the world,
as a testimony to all the nations;
and then the end will come.