

“Technicolor Dream”

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Jeremiah 31:15-22

Matthew 1:18-25

[Matthew 2:13-23]

*...behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,  
“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife,  
for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit;  
she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,  
for he will save his people from their sins.”*

*Matthew 1:20<sup>b</sup>-21*

Let us pray... O God,

Reassure us in the midst of life. Sound the alarm for us when trouble comes.

Call us home when we wander too far.

But most of all, give us a vision we can live into.

Amen

Do you remember your dreams?

I seem to wake up right as things are getting interesting –  
then I suddenly can't recall what it was all about.

However, there are some dreams that I can bring to mind  
even decades later.

One of them is a recurring dream about a particular place – a restaurant,  
and I always seem to know how to get to it, navigating the streets of a town.

Some dreams have been very meaningful,  
even prophetic – well, to a degree.

A long, long time ago, I dreamt I was driving through a strange neighborhood  
of ranch-style houses.

Years and years later, I realized – as I was driving from my parsonage  
to the church I was serving at the time in the Tampa-Bay area,  
that the street I was on resembled that dreamscape...

<Twilight Zone music cues in right about now...>

Dreams are significant in today's Gospel lesson today which is

the first of three dreams experienced by Joseph the husband of Mary  
in which he is visited by 'an angel of the Lord'.

There is another Biblical 'Joseph' who was also a dreamer –

Joseph the 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob who became the Pharaoh's chief of staff,  
despite his older brothers' foul play.

This is the same Joseph with the 'technicolor dreamcoat'

whose story is retold in a modern musical,  
but we are getting ahead of ourselves...

Willard, p.2

That first dream came to Joseph the carpenter as a promise  
reassuring him that his wife Mary's pregnancy –

though alarming to him, is nevertheless explained.

Though he knows society will look upon Mary and the baby with shame  
and despise him, too, calling the child as that 'carpenter's son',

yet he learns that her pregnancy has a legitimacy  
because God is the Creator.

How unfortunate that Western society – especially, the Church,  
has not recognized how the circumstances of Jesus' birth  
legitimizes all children.

Our narrative as Christians tells us that

the Savior of humankind was conceived by the power of God

the Creator of the Universe, and was borne by a human woman.

But now it is Joseph & his wife Mary who are responsible for raising him!

This was kind of like winning the lottery –

and being responsible to pay it back, if something goes wrong!

Whether you believe the birth of Jesus happened in this way – or not,  
consider the significance of why this story is in the Bible.

Consider just how unlikely the situation is presented –

God boldly enters the world as a little baby of humble beginnings,  
vulnerable and at great risk.

It is even with a certain reckless sense of humor,

that God puts God's own self on the line –

by the will of God without the help of the will of a man.

Perhaps another way of thinking of this story is that there are still perils  
for children brought into this world amidst poverty, prejudice, and war.

Perhaps this story is a way of introducing the idea

that the lowest common denominator of worth in this world  
is the personhood of a human being

because it became equated with the personhood of our God.

The second dream was an alarm to get up and go!

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and wise men came from afar  
to honor him – as the King of the Jews.

They were brought before King Herod the Great... the Great Tyrant  
who doesn't let on that he is morbidly upset by this,

but tells them to return with news of the child's whereabouts.

The wise men were warned – also by a dream and don't go back to Herod...

Willard, p.3

The story continues with Matthew 2:13-18...

*<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold,  
an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,  
“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt,  
and remain there till I tell you;  
for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”*

*<sup>14</sup> And [Joseph] rose and took the child and his mother by night,  
and departed to Egypt, <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod.  
This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet,  
“Out of Egypt have I called my son.”*

*<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men,  
was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed  
all the male children in Bethlehem  
and in all that region who were two years old or under,  
according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.*

*<sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:  
<sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled,  
because they were no more.”*

There is no historical record of such a “massacre of the innocents” –  
we have no idea how many children were to have been killed,  
but we know too well that such atrocities still go on  
against the most vulnerable people.

It is rare to preach on this text,  
generally because we want to emphasize the hopeful and joyful message  
of the birth of Jesus ‘The One Who Saves’ who represents  
God being with us – ‘Emmanuel’.

Still this story provides a context for the kind of world  
that Jesus was born into – and the kind of world that children  
are still born into.

We are having a special service this afternoon called “Hope For Healing”  
to address the sadness that comes for some of us  
around the time of holidays.

This could be ongoing grief for the loss of a loved one,  
SAD or Seasonal Affective Disorder symptoms, or just the blues  
for whatever the reason.

Part of this service will involve lighting candles – light in defiance of the gloom  
signifying that we can’t always be happy, but we can find joy  
regardless of our circumstances.

Willard, p.4

In response to the killings, Matthew 2:18 refers to this passage in Jeremiah 2:15

*18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled,  
because they were no more.”*

However in the stories of Genesis about Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel and their offspring who became the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel,

Rachel's children were not killed

[Note: Jacob had 4 sons by handmaids, 2 each by Zilpah and Bilhah].

Rachel's sons were Joseph and Benjamin and the other sons were Leah's, but Joseph was Jacob's favorite, to whom he gave a 'coat of many colors' a special gift – which drove his brothers crazy with jealousy.

They conspired to have Joseph carried off to slavery in Egypt, but his gift for interpreting dreams carried him through bondage to become the Pharaoh's most trusted adviser.

When famine drove Jacob's family to seek help from the Egyptians

the 10 sons of Leah & Jacob came before Joseph –

who recognized them though they did not know him.

Joseph as Pharaoh's official insisted that they return with their youngest brother, Benjamin, which they did.

But then Joseph arranges to have Benjamin accused of stealing.

The brothers plead for Benjamin's release – and it is at this point that Joseph reveals himself to them.

Benjamin was never detained, so Rachel would not have been aware of any other loss besides that of Joseph.

What '*Rachel weeping for her children*' represents is

the loss of the northern tribes of Israel when these lands were captured by the Assyrians and the people dispersed.

Our lesson today from the Jeremiah passage begins with this lamentation of Rachel, but then goes on to be an invitation to hope...

*16 But I, the LORD, say to dry your tears.*

*Someday your children will come home from the enemy's land.*

*Then all you have done for them will be greatly rewarded.*

*17 So don't lose hope. I, the LORD, have spoken.*

The third dream of Joseph the carpenter was about taking his family out of Egypt and 'coming home'.

*19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,*

*20 “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.”*

Willard, p.5

We can get stuck in a black or white view of reality  
and think those are our only options in life.

But there are dreams we can live into when we are wide awake,  
believing that life is not just black or white, or an indifferent gray,  
but technicolor – and three-dimensional as well.

Jesus grew up to be a great teacher who taught in parables  
that God's Kingdom of Heaven can't really be described  
except by using parables, stories, word pictures...

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of that Kingdom as a Beloved Community  
that was also the American Dream fulfilled.

I will close with a quote from that great orator  
who also quoted visions from the Prophet Isaiah and Samuel Francis Smith...

'I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted,  
and every hill and mountain shall be made low,  
the rough places will be made plain,  
and the crooked places will be made straight;

"and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."<sup>2</sup>

This I our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair  
a stone of hope.

With this faith,  
we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation  
into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith,  
we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together,  
to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together,  
knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day –

this will be the day when all of God's children  
will be able to sing with new meaning:

*My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.*

*Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,*

*From every mountainside, let freedom ring!*

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.'

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

Amen

*Our lesson today is from Jeremiah 31:15-22 – and it begins with a lament,  
that equates Rachel’s grief for the loss of Joseph and Benjamin,  
with the loss of the northern tribes of Israel  
to Assyrian invasion and deportation.*

<sup>15</sup> In Ramah a voice is heard, crying and weeping loudly.

Rachel mourns for her children

and refuses to be comforted, because they are dead.

<sup>16</sup> But I, the LORD, say to dry your tears.

Someday your children will come home from the enemy’s land.

Then all you have done for them will be greatly rewarded.

<sup>17</sup> So don’t lose hope. I, the LORD, have spoken.

<sup>18</sup> The people of Israel<sup>[c]</sup> moan and say to me,

“We were like wild bulls, but you, LORD, broke us, and we learned to obey.

You are our God— please let us come home.

<sup>19</sup> When we were young, we strayed and sinned,

but then we realized what we had done.

We are ashamed and disgraced and want to return to you.”

<sup>20</sup> People of Israel, you are my own dear children. Don’t I love you best of all?

Though I often make threats, I want you to be near me,

so I will have mercy on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.

<sup>21</sup> With rock piles and signposts, mark the way home, my dear people.

It is the same road by which you left.

<sup>22</sup> Will you ever decide to be faithful?

I will make sure that someday things will be different,

as different as a woman protecting a man.<sup>[d]</sup>

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

Matthew 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ<sup>[a]</sup> took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit;

<sup>19</sup> and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But as he considered this, behold,

an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife,

for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit;

<sup>21</sup> she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

and his name shall be called Emman’u-el”

(which means, God with us).

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep,

he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife,

<sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had borne a son;

and he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 2:13-23

- <sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold,  
an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,  
“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt,  
and remain there till I tell you;  
for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”
- <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night,  
and departed to Egypt, <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod.  
This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet,  
“Out of Egypt have I called my son.”
- <sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men,  
was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem  
and in all that region who were two years old or under,  
according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.
- <sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:  
<sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled,  
because they were no more.”
- <sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold,  
an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,  
<sup>20</sup> “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel,  
for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”
- <sup>21</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother,  
and went to the land of Israel.
- <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archela’us reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod,  
he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream  
he withdrew to the district of Galilee.
- <sup>23</sup> And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth,  
that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled,  
“He shall be called a Nazarene.”