

August 9, 2020

“Here Comes the Dreamer”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This 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. Now 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.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And 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." So 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, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." The 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. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come 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." But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." Reuben 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. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then 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. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, 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. When 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.

Isaiah 58:6-12

6 Is not this the fast that I choose:

*to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

*7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

*9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

*If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,*

*10 if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*11 The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;*

*and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.*

*12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.*

So last week we were talking about Jacob (aka Israel) but this week we turn a few pages forward to his young son Joseph. The scripture tells us that he is Jacob's favorite son. So much so that he gives him a big fancy, colorful coat. This of course makes his brothers very jealous.

Now prior to this passage, Joseph has had two dreams and in both of them all of his brothers are bowing down before him. He matter of factly tells his brothers this, not seeing the harm, but this does not sit well with his older brothers, who are already hurt by the favoritism Jacob is showing to Joseph.

Now I want to insert an aside here. A few decades ago the religious right took on this mantra of "family values". It was in direct reaction to the chorus of gay voices that were fighting for equal rights and to be able to keep or create their own families.

So it was code for being anti-gay, you saw it in all the political ads and flyers and heard it in all their speeches. but I remember in every debate when someone would press "what do you mean by family values?" the answer would always be "like it was in the Bible" So I want to point out that in the last few sermons we have seen what biblical family values actually looked like.

Marriage was not just between one man and one woman but between one man and two women and their hand maids. We have heard of many marriages between first cousins. We have a seen a father almost murder his son, we have seen same father cast his concubine and his other son into the dessert to die.

We have seen Jacob deceive and betray his brother and now we have seen Jacob play favorites with his sons, not a good parenting strategy which sets up this passage. The brothers hate Joseph enough to kill him. "here comes the dreamer, they said, let's kill him".

If one of the smarter brothers hadn't intervened Joseph would have been killed right then and there. Instead he is sold into slavery and sent to Egypt. Now way ahead in the story Joseph ends up not only forgiving his brothers but saving his entire family and the lives of many because he had the foresight to help Egypt plan for a famine.

But all I want to say about this is, that if his brothers had succeeded in killing him that day the consequence would have been the death of thousands.

There is a dark side to human nature that seems to want to kill, to snuff out and silence the dreamers. Those who challenge the status quo, who want us to be more than we are, that want us to care more, to be more compassionate, those with a vision of a world where everyone is free, safe, sheltered, and fed.

It happened to Jesus, the apostle Paul, and in more modern times; Lincoln, Ghandi, John Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and John Lennon, Harvey Milk, Arch Bishop Romero and countless others you haven't heard of including many women. And if they aren't murdered they are discredited, imprisoned, ridiculed, or beaten.

When somebody challenges the way things are, with the way things could be, it doesn't always go well for them.

Yet God has a way of continually putting these dreamers among us. They challenge us, to help us to Dream God's dream, our job is to listen to the dreamers, with open hearts not with closed fists.

Our obligation is to challenge ourselves when we feel something ugly rise up in us and to take a look at it honestly, humbly and prayerfully. Why am I feeling this way, what do I find threatening about this, why do I want to lash out? Is it my true self, the person I want to be, or some primal reaction to something different and challenging?

Right now we have people building an entire worldview around resisting what is different and challenging. As Christians, not as Americans, not as members of any party, not based on anything but the fact that we are followers of Jesus our job is to ask;

What is God's dream? What does God want this world to look like? What dream is he or she trying to put in our hearts? And what are we too afraid of to say "Here I am Lord, send us"?

Let's go back to the Isaiah text. I think this gives us an idea of what God's dream is for us. "To loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke. To share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless to your home, to clothe the naked, and not hide from your own kin.

And then it says what we get out of it, as individuals, as a church as a nation... then YOUR light shall break forth like the dawn and YOUR healing shall spring up quickly. If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, Then YOUR light shall rise in the darkness and YOUR gloom will be like the noonday sun. YOUR thirst quenched, YOUR Bones made strong, YOUR ancient ruins shall be rebuilt, and YOU shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

Here it is folks: The key to healing ourselves is in healing others. Our welfare is inextricably connected to the welfare of others.

Can you hear that through the lens of your hearts, your hearts heavy with the burden of current events. Our healing comes when we work toward the healing of others. Our restoration comes when we work to restore others.

Our GLOOM, lord knows we have been feeling some of that, OUR GLOOM will be as bright as the noon day sun and we will be called the repairers of the breach. I ask has there been a bigger breach to be restored in our country since the civil war? I don't think so.

And man have I been hiding from some of my kin, or at least am currently taking a break from them on Facebook. We have been rendered apart not just by a difference of opinion but by a difference of morality.

Folks so much of Christianity has dropped the ball, they have let themselves be conscripted and manipulated by politicians and religious leaders that they have moved away from scriptures like this in exchange for keeping things as they were in some idealized past that really never existed.

Maybe it seemed to exist as long as you were white, Christian, not divorced, not gay, or trans, not sick or hungry or poor, or disabled, or being abused.

But they have forgotten, or never learned or willfully ignored what God's dream is. They have closed their heart to those visions and dreams that God gives us to keep us moving toward this dream.

If I stood up and read this Isaiah scripture in congress today and people didn't know it was from the bible, I would be labeled a socialist which I am not, I would be demonized on the spot as one of those evil liberals.

But these scriptures are thousands of years old, God's dream isn't one just conjured up in the last political cycle, it is an ancient dream.

One that Jesus sought to bring about by feeding the hungry by healing all those he encountered, by preaching that we are all loved equally, forgiven equally by God. This is a dream that has been fought for by both parties in our history on some weird cycle that I have yet to figure out.

We are in a crisis situation on so many levels and the breach seems to be ever widening. But our national problems have solutions.

Those solutions, they will never be found unless we begin all our discussions with mutual respect, whether at our own dinner tables, our city council meetings, or in our congress.

Solutions won't be found until we have those discussions with hearts open to the dreamers, and to our dreams, and until we attack the problems together with the same fervor that we have been attacking each other.

We have to let this be the cornerstone of all our discussions. This notion that we are all equal in the eyes of the Lord. Part of God's dream that is also part of our nation's dream.

We don't know if our government is going to fix itself anytime soon but we can be the change we seek. We can keep being the dreamers, and sharing this dream with love and kindness in our hearts. We can keep asking ourselves everyday, Lord what can I do to give life to your dream today?

Send a check to an organization that feeds the hungry, buy a fair trade product even though it costs more, call your sister who stormed out of the house over her politics and tell her you love her and will always love her no matter who is in office. Buy school supplies to give away, write a congressman, vote, write a letter to the editor... You and the Lord will figure out what is the next right thing to do. Just keep letting your light break forth like the dawn and keep dreaming God's dream. AMEN

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