

Trinity United Methodist Church, Iron Mountain, Michigan
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, August 12, 2018, 9:15 a.m.
Scripture (NRSV) Sermon by Pastor Geri Hamlen

This summer we are looking at the variety of ways in which God communicates with people. So many different ways. Burning bushes. Prayers. Strangers from afar. Today we are going to look at how God works through Dreams. Specifically...the night time dreams while we are sleeping. Not the day-dreams that come to us when we are planning and trying to figure out what to do with the rest of our lives. Or dreams we have about how the world could be a better place if only....No, let's look at how God made us to sleep, perchance to dream starting off with the Dream Master of the Old Testament...Joseph. One of the 12 boys born to Jacob. This is the Joseph who was favored by his father...Remember the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat? And despised, even hated by his brothers. Hear how it all played out with a dream and a dreamer.

Old Testament Reading Genesis 37: 5 – 11

Pastor: Once Joseph had a dream.

When he told the dream to his brothers, they hated him even more.

Jill/Joseph: Please listen to this dream I had!

There we were, binding stacks of hay into sheaves in the field.
Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood up,
and then your sheaves all gathered around it
and bowed down to my sheaf.

Pastor: Joseph's Brothers were very annoyed saying:

Jill/Joseph's Brothers: Are you serious?

You think you are somehow destined to reign over us?

You think you are going to be our king?

Pastor: This dream and what he told them about it
made Joseph's brothers hate him even more.

But Joseph had another dream,
and he *made the mistake of* telling them about this dream too.

Jill/Joseph: Listen! I've had another dream:

I saw the sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowing down to me.

Pastor: When he told this dream to his father and brothers,
even his father, Jacob, scolded him.

Jill/Jacob: What kind of dream is this?

Do you actually think your mother and I and your brothers
are going to bow down before you?

Pastor: Joseph's brothers had become *extremely* jealous of him.

But his father—*though he scolded Joseph*—
kept this dream in *the back of his* mind.

Liturgist: The word of God from long ago to the people of God today.

Thanks be to God.

It is not clear that these dreams of Joseph originated with God but it is obvious that the dreams of this young man Joseph, set the stage for family conflict and they actually propelled his brothers into selling him into slavery which took him all the **way to Egypt and jail and ultimately to the court of Pharaoh.**

There is something about these dreams of Joseph that God wants us to pay attention to. Did you notice that Joseph simply tells his dreams...it's his brothers and then his father who interpret them in the most negative kind of way...accusing Joseph of arrogance and foolishness...as if Joseph could control the dreams that came to him in his sleep. We all know that night time dreams are not consciously motivated thoughts.

There's a lesson here about how Dreams, shared with others can be a tricky proposition because when dreams are interpreted by others, from a position of anger and distrust...they can be mis-understood and can lead to destruction and, as in Joseph's family, lead to a series of events that only God can untangle and use for good...Which God does over and over again if you were to continue reading the story of Joseph's time in Egypt.

Out of this 'dream turned nightmare' scenario between Joseph and his brothers comes the opportunity for Joseph to save his family from famine and starvation and to lay the foundation for the Jewish people and the nation of Israel to come...which was God's dream from the start. And it all started with a dream that God used for God's purposes.

Morning Hymn

Children of the Heavenly Father

4 verses

#141

God loves children...God loves children enough to be born among us as the baby Jesus. Let's hear how God uses dreams in the life of another Joseph...Joseph, husband of Mary in the Second Testament who dreamed the dreams of God...four of them all in the first two chapters of Matthew. We will read all of them this morning starting with Joseph at a time when he had big decisions to make about his relationship with Mary.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 1: 18 – 24, 2: 13 – 15, 19 – 23

Liturgist: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph,

but before they lived together,

she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man

and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,

planned to dismiss her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this,

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

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,

for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus,

for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord

through the prophet:

Pastor: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.”

Liturgist: When Joseph awoke from sleep,

he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;

he took her as his wife....

Joseph had a good plan, to treat Mary with respect but to dismiss her quietly. But God had a bigger and the best possible plan for Joseph and Mary and all of humanity. God had a plan as revealed through the prophet Isaiah and that plan required Joseph to do his part. So...God gave Joseph a dream with an angel to change his mind and his plans. And Joseph was faithful to that dream from God and did as he was told.

The second dream came later, after the strangers from afar, the Wise Ones came to visit...

Now after the wise Ones left,

an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,

“Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt,

and remain there until I tell you;

for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night,
and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.
This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet,
Pastor: "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

*Joseph didn't know the danger to the baby Jesus but God did. And God sent an angel to warn Joseph...in his dream...in his sleep...about the King's terrible plan. And the angel of God told Joseph what to do. How to get away.
Again...Joseph was faithful to that dream and got up and went to Egypt. In keeping with the words of the prophet, Hosea...Out of Egypt I have called my Son. Isn't it interesting how the two Josephs we are hearing about this a.m. have Egypt in common?
The third dream of God for Joseph came even later...we don't know how long the little family was in Egypt but here is what happened next.*

Liturgist: When King Herod died, an angel of the Lord
suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,
"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel,
for those who were seeking the child's life are dead."
Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother,
and went to the land of Israel.

Again, Joseph was faithful to God's dream and brought his family back to Israel. But there was still danger...it wasn't over yet...The fourth dream of Joseph happened like this.

But when Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea
in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.
And after being warned in a dream, JOseph went away to the district of Galilee.
There he made his home in a town called Nazareth,
so that what had been spoken through the prophets
might be fulfilled,

Pastor: "He will be called a Nazorean."

Four times, Joseph was faithful to the dreams of God which gave him guidance, warning and fulfilled the words of the prophets.

Liturgist: The word of God from long ago to the people of God today.

Thanks be to God.

The Message *'The Dreams, the Dreamer, the Hope'* Pastor Geri Hamlen
Does your dog dream? I watch my little beagle dog, Scarlett, sleep and I see her eyes moving and her legs twitching and sometimes she makes little moaning noises...I imagine her dreaming about all the rabbits that got away in her life-time!

Yes, animal researchers are investigating the possibility that many animals with a backbone...the vertebrates...have a dream process that is similar to ours. That hypothesis will keep lots of people busy investigating for a long time to come but there is no doubt that dreaming serves a purpose in how God made us. And how God made dogs!

Dreams, sleeping in general, is a restorative activity. A time of rest. A chance for our bodies to heal and regenerate. A reprieve from the busyness and doing-ness that fills our waking hours. And research shows that there is a memory storage process going on as information and activities of our daily lives are down-loaded to the longer term memory storage places.

Have any of you seen the movie *'Inside Out'*? It's a Disney/Pixar movie that I saw for the first time at Camp M on a rainy afternoon while waiting for the weather to clear. Most of the kids there had seen it at least once and some of them...hundreds of times!

It's a story of a little girl Riley, as told by the emotional components in her brain. Joy and Sadness and Anger, Disgust and Fear...each were made into characters...the main characters of the movie actually...who spent their days and nights viewing and reacting and guiding the events in Riley's life. The movie created a picture of what I've heard described as the Committee in our heads...those voices in our minds that tell us what to do and what not to do and argue among themselves about this, that and the other thing.

It's a good movie that I look forward to seeing again sometime...but the reason I bring it up is that the movie shows the night time/dream processes of the brain. While other systems are shut down, resting, replenishing, the memory storage process is clicking right along as memory balls are transported through tubes to huge, gigantic shelves for filing and retention. And hopefully organized for easy access...which becomes more challenging when we don't get enough sleep and as we get older.

What was missing from the movie, *Inside Out*, and of course Disney just can't do it all in one movie, was the entrance of God into that shadow-land of dreams. There was no hint of the possibility that God can direct our dreams, send angels to talk to us in dreams, inspire and even warn us in dreams. That would have added a whole other dimension to the story ...but we, as the children of God, know from reading the Bible that we are dreamers and we have dreams and that God is present in our night time dreams and in the way they are lived out in the world.

Think about it...Where would we be without Joseph of the Old Testament...He was not only a dreamer but also an interpreter of dreams. For the prisoners in his cell with him in Pharaoh's Egypt. And eventually for the Pharaoh himself who elevated him to a position of power and authority that allowed him to welcome his family into the Egyptian community...And then came Moses some 400 years later to lead them out of Egypt to the Promised Land. **The children of Abraham, the tribe that went on to become the nation of Israel were formed out of the dreams of Joseph**...This is a group of people that God has committed to...made covenant with...a people that will be more numerous than the grains of sand on the beach. Than the stars in the sky and...this people of God's own choosing will be a light for all the nations.

That's God's dream...that those who call ourselves the children of God—yes, that includes us, here at Trinity---will be a light for all the world. But God's dreams don't come true overnight. More dreams and dreamers were necessary to bring us to this point in time.

Where would we be if Mary's fiancée...Joseph in the New Testament...had not paid any attention to the dreams God sent him? Would Jesus have been born to a shamed and ostracized single mother? Would he have been destroyed by King Herod? Would he have missed out on the love and care of extended family and community? Would he have fallen prey to the temptations of the devil? What would the world be like if any of those scenarios had played out?

But we don't have to worry about that because the Dreamer, Joseph, husband of Mary, was faithful to the Dreams that God sent and Jesus grew and increased in wisdom and goodness, in divine and human favor and became our Teacher and Savior.

A review of the Bible reminds us that There are many dreamers with dreams that have served God's purpose.

King Nebuchadnezzar, a Persian king who kept the people of God in captivity.... had dreams and needed Daniel, one of God's prophets to interpret for him.

Cornelius...a Centurion, a Roman Army Commander, who dreamed that he was to speak with the Disciple and Apostle Peter and invited him to dinner and wound up being baptized in the Holy Spirit along with his household and friends.

The wife of Pontius Pilate...as he sat on the judgment seat, wondering what to do with this Jesus...she warned him to be very, very careful.

Dreams are part of God's interaction with us...For this time and place...We are his dreamers.

Somehow, in mystical ways that the scientists have not yet described, God enters into the night-time drama in our brains—even as memories are being stored and conflicts re-lived. Even as nightmares wake us up and remind us of how fragile we are by ourselves...there is something of God in all of that. Just like in the Bible stories we read.

God has dreams too. Dreams that we will find and share and grow peace and hope and love, right here on earth, as it is in heaven. Paul tells us the greatest of these is love but hope is that necessary seed in order for peace and love to flower.

Within our night-time dream activity are those seeds of hope.

Hope that what our minds are juggling in the night will serve as the embryo of ideas when we awake. Hope that the love of God, shared with us even when we are sleeping, will re-write the tragedies that are also part of life.

Hope that God will warn us of dangers...in our dreams, as happened for Joseph...and give us ideas about what to do next.

Hope that God will give us the strength to be faithful, the wisdom to choose wisely in our future activities and the courage to become that light for the world that is God's dream for us.

God is eager to reveal a path, the plan for living faithfully and hopefully and lovingly. God gives us dreams in order to further the plan. God works hard to put people where they need to be in order to make God's dreams come true.

We are God's Dreamers in this place. As we progress through our Jubilee Year with prayers and Bible reading and consideration of our history...let's dare to hope that God's dreams will be vivid and real to us. And that we remember them when we are awake! So that we too can be a light to the nations...or even a light to Dickinson County area? Or how about a light to this neighborhood, right here around us. Let us dream together...of making God's dreams come true...because God's power is steadfast and endures forever. Amen.