

Sermon Text for June 19, 2016

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Matthew 21: 33-46, Genesis 37: 12-28

“Are We Still Dreaming”

Last week when we gathered on Sunday I don't think any of us knew the enormity of the situation that was taking place in Orlando. It was just another shooting, and maybe for some of us, it still is just another one of a long, long, long list of shootings that have happened within our country. But this one is different for me, and let me tell you why. A few years ago I led our session to a very specific and defining letter to the congregation in regards to gay marriage. At that time in the history of our nation and in the history of our denomination we felt like it was important to make a stance. I continue to stand by that letter, but in whatever way that letter and my stance today and my stance in the past has contributed to people interpreting our stance to take actions or say words out of hatred and fear, I apologize. If ever anyone in this church would look down upon, say some unkind words or belittle any gay person attending this church, then we should repent. I want this church to be the straight church or Strasburg, I want it to be the Gay church of Strasburg, I want it to be the poor church of Strasburg, I want it to be the rich church of Strasburg. Any kind of demographic group that you can imagine should be welcomed here, and if we have ever contributed to hate, hurt, or bigoted words and actions toward our gay brothers and sisters, then we should repent. I wish I had said that last week, I'm sorry I'm late.

Last week we were introduced to Joseph as this fledgling leader who had to learn what it takes to lead people the hard way. He knew nothing about servant leadership. Today he pays the price for that. Today, we look again at Joseph again, but today he is called nothing but a dreamer. Throughout Scripture we read about dreamers, Jacob, Samuel, the three kings, Peter. All of these dreamers have something in common, in their dreams they get a vision from God which commands them to do something which is out of the ordinary, risky, which could get them in trouble, absolutely contrary to the status quo. They all decide to go forward and follow their dreams because they realize that their dreams are from God. Today we are going to learn to dream, not to be afraid of

imagining that God has something extraordinary planned for you, for all of us, for this church. So often we are afraid of dreamers, but we are told today not to hinder God's dreams, or you might find yourself working against God.

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I have always been fascinated by dreams. I don't pretend to know how to interpret them, but they have always left me wondering what is God's intention for certain dreams and if God has a part in dreams at all. I have studied the physiological and psychological reasoning behind dreams and what synapses cause what kinds of dreams. It is not nearly as fascinating to me as the biblical accounts of God actually bringing about God's purposes on this earth through people's visions of what can be. Think about it, Freud's interpretations don't hold a candle to Joseph as he later tells the ruler of Egypt exactly what is going to happen and how to prepare for it.

There is no question that Joseph is a dreamer. Last week his dreams made him hated, and this week they nearly get him killed. He is out wandering on orders from his father to find his brothers and report back to him on them. His brothers on the other hand have left Shechem to go to Dothan which happen to be a large center of commerce and industry where they could probably have a little more interaction with people than back in Hebron.

They see Joseph from a distance and without hesitation their first reaction is: let's kill the kid. Here comes that dreamer, let's get rid of him. Why do they want to get rid of him, look at verse 20, we shall see what will become of his dreams. They expect that with the death of Joseph will be the death of his dreams. Kill the dreamer and you kill the dream. That was their plan.

You need to understand what the brothers are going through. They represent the stable status quo, they are the oldest brothers so the ones who should be calling the shots, the ones who should be in power. Joseph, on the other hand, is a dreamer and his dreams put their position, the status quo, in jeopardy. So in order to keep the status quo, in order to keep things the way they are, you eliminate the dreamer, you eliminate the dream, or the threat.

What they don't understand is that the dream does not belong to Joseph, it belongs to Almighty God. What they missed was the fact that God is so much bigger

than the dreamer, and that the dream will continue in spite of the brothers' attempts. Joseph is merely the carrier of the dream. They decide not to kill the dreamer after a couple of brothers decide that even though he is trouble he is still a brother. Instead they take this coat and tear it to shreds, they take this dreamer and the symbol that he had of superiority and tear it apart. They send Joseph to a far away land thinking that they will never have to deal with that dream again. For 20 pieces of silver Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers and the brothers think the deal is done. The dreamer is gone, the dream is gone, the status quo is preserved.

There is another man in Scripture who is sold for 30 pieces of silver by someone whom he considered to be his brother. Who was that? Judas sold our Lord and Savior to the religious leaders, the status quo of that day for 30 pieces of silver in order to maintain the status quo, in order for the dream to be killed. Jesus had a dream that one day the poor would be blessed, those who mourned would be comforted, the weak would become strong, the hungry would be filled, the merciful would be graced, the pure would gain a new vision, the peacemakers would become children of God, the persecuted would inherit the kingdom of heaven. Get rid of the dreamer, and the dream will disappear, that's the thinking, right? But it doesn't work that way does it?

But what we find in the parable that we read in Matthew is that even if you kill the messengers, the slaves, the prophets who announce the dream, even if you kill the son, the one who was maker of the dream, the dream will live on. Jesus in this parable is talking about the Pharisees and Sadducees who hoped to destroy the dream by killing the dreamer. Look around you, and ask yourself, did they succeed? When Jesus died on the cross, did the dream die with him? No, just as Christ rose from the dead, so did the dream rise again and give us all new life. But he calls us today to be dreamers as well.

We are the new dreamers. We have been given the dream that Jesus brought to the earth. It is a dream that is for all the people, for you and for me. It is a dream that takes a sinner and makes him pure as snow. It is a dream where it takes a broken life and by the grace and love of God puts it back together again. We are all empowered to carry the dream, the plans of God's kingdom here on this earth forward. If we do not, God will find other means to accomplish God's goals, but God wants to use each of us.

There are times when we are like Joseph, where our dreams are really God's spirit and inspiration that guide us. Those are the times that we feel the most free, we feel that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Then there are times when we want to kill the dreamer and get rid of the dream. It may be that there is a new idea or a risky scheme that is being proposed and you fear that things are no longer going to be normal around you. Remember that Joseph was sold in to slavery and the dream lived on, our Lord and Savior was hung on a cross to bleed and die, but the dream, God's plans continue to be carried out through us.

We are heading into a future, here at First Presbyterian Church, that may seem a bit far-fetched. There are people among us who have big dreams, and I simply ask you, that if you don't want to get on board, then don't prevent them from dreaming and seeing where God just might lead this church with those dreams. I need to tell you about this past session meeting. Nothing monumental happened, we passed a children's church program to happen in the fall which probably was the most contentious of all the issues we discussed. But I need to tell you, there was a spirit that was so refreshing during and after the meeting. I have seen and heard of people over these past few weeks who were at odds with each other ending up hugging each other's neck and speaking words of encouragement. We are dreaming of rediscovering what church can be like if people truly love one another and want to be a family with each other. Don't be afraid to dream of this church becoming the beacon of light in a dark world where people from all over will come to worship the Almighty and living God.

May God bless us as we follow God's dream to be vehicles of his kingdom here on this earth. Amen.