

Sunday, August 20, 2023 ***Joseph's Coat***
Joel 2:28-32

Genesis 37

Dreams- we all had them, and we continue to have them. But what makes a dream so important for us today? Cinderella's song from 1950 includes the lyrics *"A dream is a wish your heart makes; When you're fast asleep. In dreams you will lose your heartache, Whatever you wish for, you keep. Have faith in your dreams and someday; Your rainbow will come smiling through; No matter how your heart is grieving; If you keep on believing. the dream that you wish will come true."*

But what is the significance of a dream in today's world when we hear the news of today bringing the stories of destruction, climate change and human loss from circumstances beyond one's control? Do we dare to dream? And of what are we dreaming? That things will be like it was in the 1950's, 1980's, way back in 2019 before the pandemic? Or do we look to the new world that is emerging for the next generation of leaders and our youth today?

In the Canadian novel, *The Marrow Thieves*, Cherie Dimaline tells of a dystopian world nearly destroyed by global warming. In order to recover what the world has lost, {Indigenous} people are hunted for their bone marrow. And what is it that is lost? The ability to dream. She writes, "The suburban structure of lives had been upended. People got sicker in their head. They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge." (p. 88) So where are the dreamers today? How might we understand the need to dream, to have a new vision and to have faith in God for what is to come? And how does Joseph's story connect with the dreams of the past and our future?

Our "At Your Request" story today is "Joseph's Coat" which is a story of sibling rivalry, hatred, hurt, mistrust and dreams lost, found and interpreted for the future. It is a story of Jacob and his wives Leah and Rachel and their family of at least 11 sons. It is a story of favouritism and demonstrated love to one son over others, along with the jealousy and revenge taken upon the rest of the shepherd siblings.

The father Jacob also known as Israel is not a stranger to sibling rivalry as he and his brother Esau fought over the birthright which should have been Esau's. But Jacob too is a dreamer with a ladder reaching up into God's heavens. The angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Eventually he marries Leah and in turn Rachel and they have several children together. And one of them, Joseph born to Rachel the woman he truly loved and this is beginning of Joseph's story. A young man of 17 who is truly loved by his father, given a special

garment. This coat is a token of love but also becomes a symbol of favouritism and the reason for hatred to grow amongst the children of Jacob.

But Joseph is also a dreamer like Jacob. He remembers his dreams and on two occasions tells the dreams to his brothers and father. The first dream is of them all binding sheaves in the field. My sheaf rose and stood upright and yours gathered around it and bowed down. The brothers questioned the meaning of this dream- are you to reign over us and have dominion over us? This caused them to hate him more.

A second dream was similar—the sun, moon and 11 stars were bowing down to him and again they grew angry. When Jacob sent Joseph to check on the brothers tending the sheep in the field, they had decided to put him in a pit and kill him. Their hatred was so strong they were ready to kill him. As Joseph pined for freedom, they sat and ate as they discussed their next move. They felt no remorse for detaining him, but Reuben did not want him dead but thought that they could profit from their brother's 'disappearance'. Merchants in the area were heading to Egypt and so they decide to sell Joseph to them. They were willing to have this strong young man amongst them as a slave and took Joseph away to Egypt.

Yet what were the brothers to tell their father about Joseph's disappearance? They killed a goat and put its blood on the treasured coat. They sent their father the coat and on seeing it, Jacob believed that Joseph was rent in pieces. Jacob grieved and refused to be comforted. They spilled the blood on it as a sign of revenge for Joseph being favoured. And Jacob is afflicted in grief, tearing his garments, putting on sackcloth and mourning.

However, Joseph is alive and his story continues in Egypt. He eventually finds favour with Potiphar in the pharaoh's court and God was with him. Joseph was put in charge of the house and through a series of events he ends up interpreting dreams of two prisoners as well as the pharaoh. It is in his ability to interpret the dreams that Joseph rises to power as he learns of the prosperous years and famine years to come. He is put in charge of keeping safe the food in the good years for the years which follow. And it is in this time that his family goes to Egypt and bows before him as a leader in Pharaoh's court who is distributing the food. The dreams he had as a young man come true—he is in a position of power and his brothers do bow to him. Of

course there is much more to the story but the idea that Joseph's dreams do come true call us to reflect on what this means for us.

Joseph's life is a testament of the grace of God for those who live faithfully and righteously. Yes there was favouritism and jealousy by Jacob and his other sons; but in spite of being sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph remained faithful and trusted in God to deliver him from slavery. Joseph was favoured by his father but the brothers did not want him dead just punished as they were very jealous of the bond they had shared. God chose Joseph to rise in power in Egypt not because of favouritism, but because Joseph did not waiver from his faith in God. Joseph does rise to power in Egypt but at what cost? Joseph was rejected by his family, sold as a slave, went to prison, was given the gift that no one seemed to want to hear and faced hardship in a foreign land.

We know that there are different kinds of dreams. You've probably experienced them. Something going through your mind and yet is so vivid that you think you are awake. Only later on do you realize you were asleep but still seem tired. There are dreams and visions that are direct from God—like Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, for he was ready to divorce Mary but was warned in a dream to marry her as she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. He was also told in a dream to leave Bethlehem and then later on to return safely. These were different kinds of dreams- but still images of what they should and should not do.

Symbolic dreams like Joseph's with the coat of sheaves and stars bowing to him are seen as prophecy or predictive dreams. Something to come but it is not clear how. There are many kinds of dreams but what is important that the message from Joseph's story is not about hoping that things will turn out better. It serves to point forward to the hope that comes in Jesus. We each need to dream for as long as there are dreamers there will never be want for a dream. (Dimaline, p.231) This story inspires us to have faith through all our trials, knowing that God will deliver us in the glory of his justice. Because at some point, God's glory will be revealed to us. And this is something we can hold on to in faith, in hope and in love for God.

Let us pray:

Holy God as we heard Joseph's story we remember his dreams for what was to come. So often we do not pay attention to what our minds wander and do. Yet when we focus our thoughts on you so many things can change—from within us and to those around us who experience your love as Jesus taught us to share.

Help us to dream, to reach out to you and to fully put our trust in you as we seek to live each day in hope. Reveal yourself to us we pray as our hearts are open to your Spirit. SILENCE>

In thanksgiving we pray. Amen.