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Athelstone Uniting Church #115

9 August 2020

Dreaming Big!

Text: *Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Matthew 14:22-33*

Last week, I preached an emotional sermon as I shared about my own experience of wrestling.. with the challenges of life and of recognising the blessings along the way. Well, this has been a better week.. not without its challenges, but definitely an improvement on last week! Thank you to all those who have sent me notes of encouragement and checked in on how I am going. I appreciate your care for me!

Well, this week's readings contain more 'wrestling' – definitely challenges - that people had to deal with... Joseph.. and Peter.. had their own personal challenges to wrestle with.

Turning to Joseph first - for some reason, the Lectionary leaves out some important parts of his story.. let me read you verses 5 to 11, just so you get the whole picture:

⁵ Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

⁸ His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

It's not a surprise that one of Jacob's sons was known for having dreams that helped him to imagine a world that was yet to be. It was Jacob who, in the middle of the night, saw angels climbing and descending a ladder, and it was Jacob whose middle of the night encounters included a stranger with whom he wrestled – as we heard about last week.

Joseph shared his gift of dreams, and he was both despised and celebrated for them. Joseph's brothers were already resentful of the favouritism their father showed Joseph. Joseph's dreams only makes things worse.

In one dream, Joseph's brothers and his parents bowed down to him.

To be honest, Joseph wasn't behaving in a way that was going to have anyone bow before him! He didn't appear to show any sign of tact or humility as he shared the dream ..

This all in a family marked by dysfunction! Favouritism amongst the sons, highlighted with an extravagant gift of an out-of-place colourful coat, speaking behind each other's backs, plotting and scheming..

It was not a healthy situation and all the members of the family had a part in that – especially Jacob the father.

For a while there, this chapter, in the much bigger story about Joseph, sounds like a story of brothers being brothers.. until they acted on their anger and things took a much more serious turn. Rueben had intended to rescue his little brother – but the plan got out of control when the brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites.

Joseph is taken off to Egypt as a slave. We'll have to turn a few more pages of the story to find out what happened and if there was a reconciliation between the brothers – Can anything good come out of what they have done? We'll come to that next week.

But for now, we're left to sit with the discomfort of what happened.

Families are difficult. How many families do you know where there is some kind of rift or estrangement that has happened in the past or is happening now?

Harsh words spoken... poor decisions made that impact others near and dear... emotional or physical harm done ... these things happen more often than we like to acknowledge.

And like Rueben, how often have we tried to fix a situation and find it gets us nowhere? Or right into the middle of the conflict!

Often estrangement occurs as a result of rash acts – a poor decision made in the heat of a moment – with life changing consequences. Estrangement is rarely one-sided.. all of the brothers look at each other through the eyes of hurt and anger. Joseph may not have even realised how much his behaviour had hurt his brothers! the brothers would have seen the favoritism their father showed and their brothers youthful boasting. Joseph, having been built up by his father's attention, saw himself as better than his brothers.

It's easy for us with all this information before us to see all these different points of view.

Not so easy for Joseph and his brothers when you are in the midst of it.

Fast forward to another situation ... the disciples are on a boat out on the water, the wind has picked up and throughout the night they have been buffeted by the waves. They would have been exhausted. And then a ghostly figure walks out towards them. In that dim light just before dawn, it would have been hard to recognise Jesus – they were terrified.

Jesus offers words of comfort: Take courage! It is I! Don't be afraid!

But then, Peter, challenges Jesus ..

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

Peter was eager to leave his mates and to join Jesus, rather than wait for Jesus to join them in the boat.

Perhaps a different interpretation than you have heard.. Barbara Brown Taylor describes Peter's behaviour as *grandstanding*. She writes:

"It is not enough for Peter that Jesus is headed straight for the boat. Peter stops him before he gets there, putting himself out front as a kind of dare. Make me do something extraordinary. Set me apart from these other men.

It is incredibly pompous of Peter, writes Brown-Taylor, but in this story, she asks, is he speaking for us?

Perhaps there have been times when you asked God to do something extraordinary, to suspend the rules of nature, so that we might believe.. How many of us want to be singled out for special treatment? To be able to climb out of the boat and do a solo that no one else gets to do? – and maybe even getting extra credit for volunteering to do so? (Look at him... so brave, so faithful..)

Sometimes we want our own miracle at the expense of others who are in the same boat as us.

Just like Joseph, puffed up with self-importance as his father showed favour toward him and he dreamed of others bowing to him – all at the expense of his brothers.

Peter soon discovers that being battered by the waves in the boat all night was nothing compared to trying to walk on water. He suddenly realises that he is out on his own – without the other disciples to share in the same struggle. His grandstanding had put him into a scary situation and he begins to sink."

The boat was seen as an early symbol for Christianity - the safe community of the early Christian church,

while the water was something to be feared – a place of chaos

Jesus was able to walk on the water – he had control over the chaos – so here was a God-moment.. when God revealed himself. According to Job 9:8, God alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea. In Psalm 89:9, the psalmist exalts the Lord, "you rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them."

In the midst of the sea's buffeting and churning, Jesus does what only God can do. He shows himself to be the Lord of the wind, waves, water and the sea. A God moment!

Perhaps there have been times when you have become aware of God's presence in the midst of a time of chaos?

There was Peter, feeling quite alone, separated, exposed, sinking, and he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus reached out his hand, caught Peter and they both got into the boat with the other disciples.

It is when they are all in the boat together that the winds calm down.

Sometimes faith is seeing the boat for what it is – a shared experience and the opportunity to lean on one another, to encourage each other in the storm. When surrounded by difficulties, we can feel safe in the boat – or the church - with Jesus present with us.

The theme for today is *Dreaming Big*

What can we learn from *Dreaming Big*?

First of all, are we talking about the kind of dream you have when asleep?

In those days, dreams were seen as visions from God. We know now that yes, this is possible, but it is also likely that dreams are the stories the brain tells during the REM (rapid eye movement) stage of sleep

There are also the dreams we have that are ideas, hopes and desires, for a better future.

So... what can we learn from either type of dream?

1. Dreams can get you into trouble...!

You don't need to tell everyone your dreams in the same way Joseph did. If you have a dream, write it down and then, after prayer, if it feels important, tell one or two trusted people and ask them to pray about it. Be humble. Be open to discernment. And having listened and discerned, if your dream still won't let you go, then keep sharing it, with grace and humility!

2. Dreams can take you to places you don't expect!

In Joseph's case, the way he shared his dreams brought out strong negative emotions in his brothers, which contributed to his downfall. He did not expect to find himself on the way to Egypt as a slave!

There are many others who have shared about their dreams – taking them to places they did not expect..

Martin Luther King Jnr famously spoke about his dream:

He said: ...even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.

He spoke about having a dream that all will be treated as equal, that oppression would be transformed into freedom and justice, that his children will one day be judged by their character rather than the colour of their skin

Little did he know where his dream would take him and what impact his dream would have on others! And in many ways that dream continues ...

3. Wherever your dreams take you, God is with you, in the stormy waters *and* in the boat.

4. It's not about you alone!

If our dreams come from God, they are not about making us Big or Super Special as individuals!

God calls us to be in community – to be connected with others – to be reconciled with others, to build others up – to raise up the downfallen.

And finally,

5. How do you know if your dream is part of God's dream?

Is there **new life** held in your dreams for someone? If so –it is likely to be part of God's dream.

Is there **healing and wholeness** held in your dream? If so –it is likely to be a part of God's dream.

Is there **joy, creativity, kindness, caring, compassion, or justice** held in any of your dreams? If so – these are very much part of God's dream.

We, the church are the people of God...

We gather to break bread as a community, with Jesus present among us, to support one another in times of trouble, to hear our story and how it fits within God's big story, and to recommit ourselves to the dream of God. We scatter to live into that dream in the power of the Spirit.

Amen

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