

Dream On, Joseph

December 23, 2007

(Advent 4 - Year A)

Matthew 1: 18-25

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

We have a very good friend of our family named Susan Kennard.

Susan Kennard is a priest in this diocese, actually she is a priest in Bay City, Texas.

We got to know Susan and her family when we were all in seminary together in Virginia.

Susan and her husband, Bill, have one grown daughter, a daughter named Sarah.

When we first met Sarah, she was in her early 20s and fresh out of college.

She lived in Virginia while we were there and we got to be good friends with her, as well.

As a matter of fact, Sarah was our chief babysitter when our boys were little.

Anyway, Susan Kennard, who is Sarah's mother, went away one summer on a mission trip to Africa.

One night while she was in Africa, Susan had a dream.

Susan had a dream that her grown daughter, Sarah, was attending a wedding.

In her dream, Sarah went to this wedding and met the man that she would eventually marry.

When Susan Kennard woke up from her dream the next morning, she remembered her dream vividly, and she had this unexplainable sense of peace - a sense that all would be well.

When Susan arrived back in the United States, she called her daughter, Sarah, on the phone.

Sarah excitedly said:

“Mom, you will absolutely not believe what I am getting ready to tell you.

You see, I went to this wedding in Missouri while you were away, and....”

And before Sarah could even get the words out of her mouth,

Her mother finished the sentence for her:

“I know, Sarah, you went to a wedding and you met the man who you are going to marry.

I know because, while I was in Africa, I had a dream.

And I believe that it was God’s message to me that you were going to be okay, and that you had met your future husband.”

Sure enough, Sarah had met Collin at a wedding in Missouri - and they were married that next year.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph lays down to sleep one night and he has a dream.

Joseph is engaged to Mary, but Mary ends up pregnant.

Being a good man, Joseph puts his shame and humiliation aside and figures out a way that he can dump Mary, gracefully.

However, just after Joseph cooked up his plan to get rid of Mary quietly, he goes to sleep that night and he has a dream.

When Joseph wakes up from his dream the next morning, he remembers the dream vividly, and he has this unexplainable sense of peace - a sense that all would be well.

In his dream, he remembers a voice saying to him:

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, for she is pregnant from the Holy Spirit.”

So, Joseph did take Mary home to be his wife, they had a baby boy and he named him Jesus.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph has a 2nd and a 3rd dream.

The second dream happens after Jesus is born and after the wise men from the East have come to Jesus.

Joseph falls asleep and a voice comes to him in this dream, saying:

“Get up, take the child and his mother and run away to Egypt so that Jesus will not be killed by King Herod.”

Then, after King Herod has died, Joseph falls asleep and a voice comes to him again in a third dream, saying:

“Get up, take the child and his mother and go back into Israel.”

In each of Joseph’s three dreams, God speaks to Joseph.

And Joseph has a sense of peace, because he knows that it is God who is speaking to him through his dreams.

Just like Susan Kennard dreamed in Africa about her daughter meeting her future husband,

Just like Joseph dreamed about Jesus,

God speaks to us through *our* dreams.

I have heard about many different types of spiritual practices and disciplines that people do in order to be in tune with God.

One spiritual practice that I have heard about is to keep a dream journal beside your bed.

By keeping a dream journal, you can write down your dreams so that you can remember them later.

Because, throughout the Scriptures, God has spoken to people, people like Joseph, through their dreams.

Therefore, remembering our dreams is a way to remember what God is saying to us while we sleep, when the noise of the world is silenced.

Even if all this stuff about dreams seems a little bizarre, it does not take away from the truth that God still speaks to us, in many, many different ways.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews begins his letter by writing:

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”¹

God’s Holy Spirit, God’s Spirit of Jesus the Son, still speaks to us in many and various ways.

¹ Hebrews 1:1-2

God's Spirit speaks to us through dreams.

God's Spirit speaks to us through prayer.

God's Spirit speaks to us when we study the Bible.

God's Spirit speaks to us through other people.

Years ago, when I would read the Bible, when I would read stories like the ones about Joseph's dreams, I would think:

"Well, sure, if I was alive during those biblical times and God spoke to me like he did to those guys, of course, I would believe it."

Yet, as I have grown in my journey of faith, I have begun to see that God *does* speak to us, in the many and various ways that he spoke to our ancestors whom we read about in the Bible.

God still speaks to us through dreams,

Through living words on a page,

Through bread and wine and water,

Through actions of strangers,

Through the simple and ordinary things in daily life, Through the Word made flesh, Jesus the Son.

Beginning tomorrow night, we will celebrate the fact that God is not watching us from a distance.

We will celebrate that God lives here, among us.

However, the key to our celebration, is

Whether we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear that God is living among us.

Whether we can hear God speaking to us in our dreams.

Whether we can see God living among us.

Whether we can hear that still, small voice of God, calling to us in the night:

"Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid."

AMEN.

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