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August 13, 2017
Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 & Matthew 14:22-33

Dangerous Dreaming

"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 'Now then, come and let us kill him. Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"

These are the words Joseph's brothers say when they see him coming from afar. The Joseph story in Genesis is different from the Jacob and Isaac and Abraham stories. It was likely written in a different time for a different people. Its author is more sophisticated, likely writing for a more sophisticated audience. God is not a character at all. Probably this was written for a time when God as a character made no sense, when the Israelites knew better than to imagine a God who wrestles with mortals or makes promises about the fertility of elderly women. No, God is not present in this story in these ways we have become accustomed to in Genesis.

But to say that God is not active in the story is not to say that God is absent. God is present. Do you know where God is active in Joseph's story? Well, as usual, our lectionary readings are most concerned with giving us the gist of the story and the most important aspect of Joseph's story is completely left out. Joseph is a dreamer. Joseph dreams dreams and God is active in the dreams.

Joseph, the youngest of twelve sons and who knows how many sisters, dreams that he and his brothers are binding sheaves in the field. Then his sheaf stands upright and his brothers sheaves bow down to his. Another dream he shares is that the sun, the moon, and the stars bow down to him. He makes the mistake of sharing these dreams with his family with predictable results. They think Joseph is full of himself.

You might think Joseph is full of himself as well. I'm a little sister and I can imagine what my big sister would have thought of a dream in which she and my parents bow down to me.

But more than a bratty brother and his delusions of grandeur is going on here. God's hidden ways show up in the dream. This dream endangers the pecking order that tells a family, tells a society who should be first and who should be last. This dream turns what is the proper pecking order on its head. It's a dream about a family, but a family that symbolizes a nation. What does it mean when the smallest, least significant part of a nation dreams that it has a say, that it has a role to play, that it has power? It means the dreamer is in trouble.

"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 'Now then, come and let us kill him. Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"

This is what Joseph's brother say when they see him coming across the field. It is also written on a plaque that hangs in the Lorraine Motel in Memphis Tennessee. Or I should say what was once the Lorraine Motel, since now it is a Civil Right Museum and monument to the most famous dreamer of our time – the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Of course, we know that killing the dreamer did not kill the dream. Martin Luther King's dream lived on, it lives on. But those who share that dream found themselves in a nightmare this weekend. White supremacists, neo-Nazis, and open-carrying camo wearing militia marched Friday night and Saturday during the day in Charlottesville, Virginia, the home of the University of Virginia. They were met by counter protesters – thousands of them. Some of them were even Episcopal clergy! As you probably know, violence erupted. In the end three people are dead, many more injured.

The vast majority of elected leaders and public figures of any political stripe condemned the white supremacists marching. But vast majority, in this case, leaves a gaping hole. Our

president condemned the violence, tellingly, *on all sides* even though literal torch bearing Nazis were on the streets of an American college town. The executive branch of the United States government was unable to simply condemn racism and hatred.

When our president cannot even go through the motions of standing up to domestic terrorists we know that we are in trouble. We are sick. We are sick with sin. Because deep down we know that Richard Spencer and the latest iteration of racist are not outliers. They are merely saying out loud what is obvious to anyone with eyes to see it.

Black unemployment is double that of whites¹. Blacks earn sixty five cents on the dollar compared to whites². Black families have, on average, one eleventh the wealth of whites³.

We incarcerate black folk at five times the rate of whites⁴. A black man is nearly four times as likely to be shot when interacting with police⁵.

Economic development of our cities displaces black families, business and institution. That's just the way it is We whitewash our history. The work of black artists is pushed to the margins of mainstream culture or it is coopted by white artists.

We accept these facts as just the way things are. It is part of the fabric of our lives and until we change these facts, we'll see more KKK who are so confident that they march without the hoods.

¹ http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/1-demographic-trends-and-economic-well-being/st_2016-06-27_race-inequality-ch1-07/

² <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/>

³ <http://www.ips-dc.org/report-ever-growing-gap/>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/18/mass-incarceration-black-americans-higher-rates-disparities-report>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/08/the-counted-police-killings-2016-young-black-men>

It's hard to resist the way things have always been. It's easier to numb myself and tune out. It's felt like something awful happens almost every week for years. I'm tired of hearing about migrants rounded up, trans people of color slaughtered, black kids who are treated like criminals and left to die like dogs in the street. But there are people in this room who never get to escape this nightmare. There is no tuning out or numbing the pain of the realization that the powers that be support elements in this country who want them gone or dead or both.

Not many things are either/or in this world. There is usually a murky middle, but this is one of those things where we have to pick a side. We have to stand against racism and bigotry and we have to start with ourselves. We have to root out the racial oppression that we breathe in like a toxin...and this includes black and white, brown, and yellow. Internalized racial oppression is for real.

In today's gospel, the disciples were spent. They were spiritually done. In a society where people did not know how to swim being on open water was terrifying. They were crossing the sea in a storm. "Lord, save me!" Peter cries. Those moments when the waters of chaos seem up to our neck – when the world is too scary or violent to go on, we can cry out. "Lord, save me."

And one of the ways God invites us into salvation is to dream. God invites us to dream a different future, a different reality. The power of sin and death is real; its grip on us is strong. But we can dream something different. And by dreaming we begin *to be* different.

What are your dreams? I dream St. Thomas is full of people of all kinds finding comfort and new life and connection to one another and to God. I dream I'm doing baptisms every week

and that the music in this place is so loud the dog walkers and the yoga goers and the latte sippers out there can't help but curiously stick their heads in to see what all the racket is.

Don't forget that dreaming is dangerous. "Here comes that dreamer...let us kill him and then see what becomes of his dream." But it wouldn't be dangerous if it weren't effective.

Dreaming changes us and by changing us, it changes the world.