

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 84

Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19

January 3, 2021

The Second Sunday of Christmas

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I recently heard the question...why do we dream?

I found this to be such an intriguing question. On the surface, it seems rather basic but the more you think about it, the more complex it becomes. To clarify, the question references the kind of dreams that we ponder deep within our hearts. Our hopes and desires. Our plans for the future. The things we pray will come to fruition.

Some of us may dream for things like a vacation or learning a new skill. Other dreams are more communal in nature like dreaming that we will find peaceful ways to resolve conflict or that we will discover a cure for cancer. While other dreams are much more personal...the things we say only to ourselves. Dreams unspoken but dearly wanted.

Dreams give us hope. They give us direction. They bring us together and build common purpose. We dream because we need to dream. We need to believe in possibility. And, when dreams are grounded in faith, they become all the more impactful. The 5<sup>th</sup> century monastic, St. Mark the Ascetic said *"Think nothing and do nothing without a purpose directed to God. For to journey without direction is wasted effort."*

You might say, daydreaming is one thing but impactful dreaming, the kind St. Mark the Ascetic is talking about, is best built upon a strong, faithful foundation that guides our actions and maintains our conviction to continually seek God's direction in our lives. That's important.

In our Gospel reading, we are told Joseph is directed by three dreams. Three dreams that serve to protect him and his family. Three dreams, that although are suggested as coming to him while he slept, actually, in my mind, describe a deeper kind of dream. A dream that is centered on the heart of God. A dream to live as God intends.

One thing we know about Joseph - he did nothing without a purpose directed to God. He was utterly faithful. As I read our story, I noticed a couple of important details...living into this kind of faithful dream for our lives does not promise ease, at least not all of the time. In fact, times may be very difficult. Following God's path, building our hopes upon faith, means that we will travel uphill both ways at times. For Joseph, he was literally running for his life and the life of Mary and Jesus. Moving from one place to another, surely worried, surely exhausted. But he had hope and he had faith and he built his dream around the trust he had in God.

Joseph stayed faithful to God's plan for his life. His dream was built upon God's dream even when times were hard, even when it would have been easier to turn his back on the challenges he faced. His dream didn't create ease but it did create promise in a better future.

We are at a turning point right now. I guess the turning of the year creates a kind of obvious opportunity for redirection. Many of us will be naming our dreams, setting our intentions, writing our resolutions. At the same time, we have all been forced to reevaluate the things that we most value, we've had to make different choices, reprioritize, and readjust.

If we are really bold, we can actually claim that 2020 was a year that helped refine our dreams and ground our purpose. It helped us see what mattered most and we found grace in unexpected places. It was a journey that was not without direction or purpose. God kept calling us forth uphill along the paths we had to walk. Like Joseph, we are surely tired and worried. Doing all we can to provide for our families. And, like Joseph, we can't give up or get discouraged. There is hope in the journey. Because God is speaking to us, encouraging us and protecting us. We just need to be open to God's dream for our lives.

What might that look like now? Are your dreams different than they were a year ago? How has God spoken to you in this long journey we are on?

I read a beautiful list of priorities written by Brian Doyle in his book *Mink River*. He writes of the words spoken by a man about to die...the words of his dream fulfilled. Here is what the man says as he talks to his son...

*"These things matter to me, son....Wrens whirring in the bare bones of bushes in winter. The way swallows and swifts veer and whirl and swim and slice and carve and curve and swerve. The way that frozen dew outlines every blade of grass....Fresh bread with too much butter. My children's hands when they cup my face in their hands....Tears of sorrow, which are the salt sea of the heart. Sleep in every form from doze to bone-weary. Pay stubs. Trains....Folding laundry hot from the dryer. A spotless kitchen floor....The way horses smell in spring. Red wines.... Postcards on which the sender has written so much that he or she can barely squeeze in the signature....The green sifting powdery snow of cedar pollen on my porch every year. Raccoons....The cheerful ears of dogs.... Fresh-mown lawns. First-basemen's mitts....Weeds forcing their way through sidewalks....Rain in every form...My wife's eyes, as blue and green and gray as the sea. The sea, as blue and green and gray as her eyes...."*

Notice that he mentions nothing of hardship or things he didn't want to do or couldn't do. He didn't mention the doubts or the questions or the struggles. He simply recalls the beauty of small moments, the grace that marked his journey, the dream that was lived out in every day ways of being. I think he would have said this is what God intended.

Reading those words made me wonder what Joseph's list might include. The things that held him fast to his dream when times were hard. Maybe they were things like holding Mary's hand at the end of a long day, his baby's smile, the sunrise on a crisp morning, the sound of their donkey eating hay, a warm meal, the sound of laughter, the peace that comes with a good night's sleep.

What would your list include? Maybe take some time to write it down. All of the things from this past year that came into greater focus, that drew you closer to what mattered, that helped you see God in new places.

As you look at your list, what does it reveal about God's dream for your life? Let your dream be built upon the lessons you have learned and the faith that holds you tight. Let it be built with God's love at the center. It will reprioritize and readjust some things. It will let go of others. And, it will make all the difference as you seek to live more fully as God intended.

Thanks be to God. Amen.