

WHAT DREAM HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ON

The gospel story from Matthew tells one of the most pivotal pieces of history in the world: Joseph is dating Mary, Mary is pregnant. We like to think that in churches you shouldn't talk about sex, politics... you can talk about religion, but right at the beginning of the gospel where we've got sex, politics and religion in the first story because Joseph has a really tough issue here: His girlfriend is pregnant and he didn't get her pregnant and there's really only two options in that time, he can either tell the religious leaders who will kindly stone her to death or he can secretly end the relationship and try to push her away so she can have the baby somewhere else but he won't be implicated. Those were his options. And the gospel tells us that he decided to, being a good man, decided to "Let's just let her go away quietly." And then he has a dream and the dream affects everything. The Angels come and say "This is actually God working through Mary. You are to marry her, you are to protect her and you will name the baby Jesus." If Joseph didn't follow what the dream had said, everything would be different. We hear a lot about Mary, we don't hear a lot about Joseph, but Joseph followed his dream, his literal dream. And what I want to talk to you about today is both the literal idea of dreams and more figurative meaning of dreams in our own lives. What does that mean?

At the literal level we all have dreams at night when we sleep. Yes you have them, even if you don't remember them, you have dreams. We all have dreams. And in this church in particular of all the churches probably in the Christian faith, we put a premium on dreams, we believe in them. And generally there are three types of dreams that you can have. One is a dream like Joseph had where you're literally presented with someone; an Angel that comes to you and says "Here is the message; do this," and maybe some of you have had those

dreams; very direct, very literal: you need to do this. Many people have those dreams even today but we don't talk about it in our secular society. Another dream that you'll have is more along the line of metaphor or symbols, or in the language of this church, correspondences, meaning that everything means something else: water could mean truth, the house could mean your spiritual life, the church could mean... you know everything has different meanings. And it could be very strategic and important to track your dreams. And in fact if you keep a dream journal you can see this played out. And then third, are sort of random dreams that generally don't have much of a meaning and they can be confusing and ah, they generally have less import. But i do find that keeping a spiritual Journal is a strategic way to live your life, it can offer guidance. And where I really see it in my own life when I've kept it and i look back years later and it's pointing, pointing, pointing "Pay attention to this, go this way, don't go this way." And ah they can be very powerful guides. So first too, in a society that looks down upon the subconscious in spirit and dreams, I want to put a shout-out for dreams. You're dreams are very important. If you start keeping a dream journal when you first wake up, you'll become more aware of your dreams. Usually for most of us we'll forget them within literally 30 seconds from waking up, even though they were just vivid a minute ago, so if you want to write something down. But they can be a part of your journal life. So dreams can be very powerful and that's absolutely what happened. The turning point in the story with this man is a dream.

I also want to talk about dreams more figuratively. By that i mean the dream of your life; the vision. In Proverbs it says "*When the people lose their vision they perish,*" and that's true in our own lives. All of us have had dreams in our lives, things that we felt like was our purpose or we should be doing or I wanted to do and one of the toughest things in life is saying "I'm not going to achieve that dream," and maybe it really wasn't critical to our purpose.

I know that when I do coaching with clients I do an intake form where I ask questions. And one of the most interesting questions is "What dreams have you given up on?" It's a very powerful answer then people say very powerful things, things like "I've given up on love, given up on anybody caring about me, I've given up on ever getting out of debt, I've given up on ever having a job that I feel purposeful about. It can be very painful and deciding that: What dreams have you given up and can you come back in this time of Advent when we're celebrating Christ coming into the world. Can you open up your heart again to that dream? Can you restart it? What are you being called to? What vision or dream are you being asked to do at this time in your life and what's holding you back; what fears? Can you imagine Joseph's fears that night? The fears that hold us back ... but deciding to follow the dream as Joseph did can be the game changer.

In his book *Starting with Why*, Simon Sinek writes a really powerful case that we should ask the question why we do things. But one of his great lines in the books he said "Martin Luther King Jr. didn't have a plan; he had a dream. There's a difference." Joe when you did the AIDS program for Africa and I remember at the time it sounded like we were going to put colonies on Mars. It was such a crazy idea. It was a dream, it was not a plan. It became a plan but it must start with a dream. The crazy things that change the world always start with a dream, a vision, something that people will probably laugh at you if you share it. So share carefully but treasure it. We're all called to those dreams.

When we don't fulfil our dreams I think of the poem *Harlem*, by Langston Hughes with that line that became a famous play: "*A Dream Deferred is Like A Raisin in the Sun*," and then he goes on to explain the horrible way of a dream deferred. He was talking about the black community in Harlem, I think it was in the 1920's, and saying that this is a community of deferred dreams and what happens when you do that to people. I think the challenge for us is not to defer

those dreams. With the power of Angels and our dreams and God, we can live out that purpose that we are being called to. As individuals and as a community, if we're going to transform this holy space that we all feel called to in some strange way and probably most of us don't know why we're here exactly, but we know that we have to have a dream for this place. It can't just be a plan; it has to be a vision that this is what is the best use of it for God and the world and that vision and we have a role in playing that which I believe we do and I'm very excited about spiritual entrepreneurship and all the concepts we've talked about this last year together. But I think we have to have a dream, we have to articulate a dream, then we can create a plan. So for all of us, when you ask yourself "What dream have I given up on," maybe it's time to reconsider those dreams, maybe it's time to ask for God's help and say "This next year as I come into it, I want to fulfil that dream. Amen.