



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Selling Our Dreams Genesis 37; Matthew 14:22-33

It is interesting how particular traits are passed down from generation to generation. We notice hair color and the shape of the face moving from parent to child. Sometimes a gesture or facial expression will even move a grandparent to a grandchild. Certainly attitudes and behaviors can be passed down from generation to generation—for good or ill. As we have noted before, Jacob, like his Uncle Laban, had a dominant “trickster gene.” Both men were cunning and conniving and you didn’t want to leave anything of value lying around when either of those two was in the neighborhood. They would trick you out of it in a heartbeat.

Apparently, Jacob’s older sons inherited a good dose of trickery and deceit for in order to get rid of their pesky little brother, they sold him into slavery and added red to his coat of many colors to trick their father into thinking that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. By the time Joseph jumped into the gene pool, however, that trait had been watered down a good bit. He gained a measure of arrogance, which he tried to use to his advantage against his brothers, but that trick backfired and landed him on a caravan headed to Egypt.

The primary trait which Jacob inherited from his father in good measure was the gift of dreaming and interpreting dreams. We know of Jacob’s dream of the ladder extending to heaven with angels ascending and descending, a sign to him that he had stepped into the gateway of heaven. His son Joseph was known primarily as a dreamer and was more than happy to share his nighttime visions and daytime dreams with anyone who would listen. He brashly told his family of the dream he had of them all working in the field binding sheaves of wheat when his sheaf stood up and all of theirs bowed down to it. He was particularly fond of the dream he had that the sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. Neither his father nor mother nor eleven brothers, however, found that vision at all amusing. To cap it all off, Joseph developed a habit of tattling on his older brothers and that never goes over well. Nevertheless, his father Jacob favored him over all of his other children. As a sign of his favor, Jacob gave Joseph a coat which may have been multi-colored, but was certainly a coat with long sleeves. Long sleeves

were worn by gentlemen farmers and city-dwellers; however, they were not the least bit practical for field work and shepherding. The older brothers chafed under Joseph's arrogance and their father's doting on his eleventh son. The more Joseph dreamed, the more they hated him and had not Reuben intervened, Joseph would have been dead.

Joseph learned the hard way that selling your dreams for your own profit is not always the best idea. Dreams were serious business in the ancient world and often considered to be a means by which God communicated with his people. The message of Joseph's dreams were clear: at some point he would be in authority even over his own family members. He would be a leader of his people, but at such a young age, Joseph misunderstood the nature of leadership and authority. He thought it meant that he would hold power over his big brothers. As a little brother myself, I understand that nothing is more appealing than to know that one day you might be able to give big brothers their comeuppance. If you gain raw power, either physically or by influence, that may be possible. God, however, deals in authority, not physical power. Joseph did not understand that the primary characteristic of authority as a leader is service. He did not realize that a leader serves the people over whom he has authority rather than lord his power over them. Had he been a bit more mature, he might have known better and, instead of bragging about a dream in which his family bowed before him, he might have given thought to the kind of service such leadership might require. He might have been wise to think, "If my family acknowledges my authority over them, what obligations and responsibilities will I have for their well-being? If I someday am elevated to a position of influence, what will I have to do to serve the people around me?"

Joseph sold his dream of authority for a pot of power. No wonder his brothers disliked him and even his parents were disturbed by his arrogance. A dream of service to others is a cherished gift and one that should be mulled over a long time before ever attempting to make it come true.

In a similar way, Joseph's brothers learned that selling their dreams along with their brother was not at all a good idea. Although I well understand how Joseph's brother's chafed under his arrogance, they would have been wise to think about what such a situation might mean for them. Although they considered Joseph's visions to be the daydreams of a spoiled brat, they, like everyone else, believed that dreams were a window into the future. They knew that God spoke through the subconscious to convey his desires. If they had acted a little more mature instead reacting like the jealous boys they

were, Jacob's older sons might have thought, "Now, if God is revealing something important to Joseph and he will one day rule over us, what might his dreams mean for us? Should we respect what God might do through our little brother?"

Although at seventeen he was pesky and irritating, Joseph must have exemplified some characteristics of leadership. They must have had other glimpses of his insight into thriftiness and preparing for the future. Surely they detected in him a sense of frugality and a willingness to look beyond today to what might be needed tomorrow. I have to wonder, had Joseph not been sold into slavery, in what ways would he have helped his own people prepare for the famine that was but a few years into their future? How might the future of God's people been different—including their forced enslavement by Pharaoh—had Joseph remained at home with his family? Would the nation of Israel have multiplied in their own land as God had promised and would they have fulfilled their calling to be a blessing to the world? We will never know, but selling their dreams along with their brother clearly changed the path Jacob's family would take. Their jealous action assured that God's people would be born under the oppression of Egypt's rule. Furthermore, the selling of their dreams and their brother meant heartbreak for their father who believed for years that his son had died under the most horrible circumstances. Selling our dreams can cause pain for ourselves and others that may never be healed.

We also learn from this story that our truest dreams come from God and that we ought to ponder them and learn from them for they may well be our deliverance at some point. As it has been handed down, the story of Joseph and his dreams teaches us that God will not be thwarted by human scheming but will shift and adjust and maneuver to do what is necessary to take care of his people. We will never know what might have happened if Joseph's initial dreams had come to life in Canaan, but we do know what happened when they became reality in Egypt. God helped Joseph learn how to interpret his dreams and those of other people. He gave him wisdom to know how to respond to impending crisis. He taught him compassion for people whose needs would be beyond their own resources. Moreover, God helped Joseph to understand that even the worst thing that had happened to him could be used by God to help other people. The selling of Joseph and his dreams became a blessing to Egypt as Joseph led the people there to prepare for the famine which could have been disastrous. His position as Pharaoh's special assistant became critical for the survival of his family and for the birth of the Hebrew nation. Scripture tells the story in such a way that each piece fits into

the other for a seamless reveal of God's authority and compassion. Certainly it did not feel seamless at the time. Fear and chaos accompany any national disaster, but Joseph held tightly to the dream and God's promise to guide him through the tragedy of the famine for the well-being of the Egyptians and his own family.

When we consider our own dreams and the ways in which God impresses upon us our place and role in the world, we need to ponder what God intends to do through us and how that might unfold through our gifts and abilities. We see, even in Peter's experience with Jesus, how easy it is to want something dramatic and fantastic to happen to us and through us; yet, Peter's sometimes contentious relationship with Jesus reminds us that the life of faith comes down to a simple matter of trust and obedience. Peter wanted to leave his friends behind in what felt like a sinking boat to walk on water as Jesus was doing. Peter was a fisherman and knew all the qualities of water. He knew the livelihood it could produce and the sense of peace and contentment it could bring on a good day of fishing. He also knew that the water could be fickle and dangerous and one's best friend was his sturdy and reliable boat. Peter wanted to do and be something God had not intended for him and Jesus allowed him to test the waters. Like Joseph, when Peter allowed his own desires and fears to guide him, he began to go under. When he kept focused on Jesus and his command to follow, however, he could walk confidently, even on turbulent waters.

All Jesus wanted Peter to do was to trust him and the gifts and abilities God had given him to fulfill his calling in life. Once Peter, like Joseph, understood God's dreams for him, he was able to lead and help other people as God wanted him to do.

God's dreams for us are not always as clear as a nighttime vision or a voice calling from the turbulent seas of life, but over time, when we look and listen, God reveals the opportunities that are before us to bring blessing to the world around us. Our calling is to pay attention to our dreams, to not sell them for an opportunity for fleeting power or a cheap thrill. Our calling is to pay attention to God's dreams for us all and then to find our place in that dream which always comes true. That is a gift we can surely pass on from generation to generation. Amen.

August 13, 2017

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

So often, when we are in what feels like a sinking boat, rather than do the things we know are essential for survival, we throw all responsibility on you, O God, and try to test you as Peter did. "If it is you, Lord, then tell me to come to you," we cry, all the while knowing that you are already coming for us. Forgive our unwillingness to trust you and our reluctance to trust the gifts you have given to us already. Thank you for patience and compassion in dealing with us and for the peace you bring to any storm of life.

Those storms seem to be frequent, O God. We hear daily of natural disasters such as fires and floods, storms and earthquakes which rob people of possessions, livelihood, and life. We witness the conflicts that rage across the world and the rhetoric that fans the fires of instability between nations. We know of friends and family who fight daily battles against disease of body, mind, and soul. And we feel the heat of conflict that burns within our community.

Bring calm and peace to our world, we pray. Soothe the passions that would cause us to be impetuous and reckless with one another. Remind us to speak less and listen more, to look into one another's eyes rather than at fists clenched in fear. Help us to recognize that together we can overcome the tragedies that we cannot always prevent and that we can prevent the tragedies we would cause. In particular, O God, we pray for the people of Guam who find themselves in the bull's-eye of intemperate rhetoric. Help them to walk safely across their troubled waters and guide the leaders of our nation and North Korea to find a calm space where the welfare of the people can become paramount. We also pray for our own nation where our perception of blessing and privilege is tainted by our ideas of race and heritage rather than by gratitude and compassion. Help us, O God, to see that you have created us all and love us all as your dear children.

We pray, O God, for the heart of a child that is open, trusting, curious, and loving. And we pray for the compassion of a parent whose only desire is the safekeeping of their child. May we realize that we are all your children and that everyone else we meet is your child as well.

You have blessed us with this beautiful, abundant, and curious world. Help us to protect it, we pray. You have given us one another so that we are not alone. Help us to protect one another, we pray. You have given us yourself so that we might never be afraid. Help us to trust your loving care. In grateful praise, we offer our prayers and ourselves. Amen.