

“Here Comes This Dreamer”

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Holy Scriptures: Genesis 37:1-28

Joseph’s Dreams

¹ Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. ² This is the account of Jacob’s family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵ Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” ⁸ His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” ¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers

actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

¹² Now his brothers had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, “As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.” “Very well,” he replied. ¹⁴ So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.” Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, “What are you looking for?” ¹⁶ He replied, “I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?” ¹⁷ “They have moved on from here,” the man answered. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.

¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ²⁰ “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” ²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. ²² “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. ²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷ Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

What season are your dreams in?

Are your dreams in the summertime of their lifespan?

Are they bathed in bright sunlight, out in the open,
celebrating long days, playful...

Are your dreams feeling like autumn:

multi-colored, fruitful, ready for the harvest...

Are they more like winter:

brisk, hidden beneath the snow, trusting in new life soon to
come,

waiting, wondering...

Maybe your dreams feel more like spring:

colorful, germinating, blossoming, blooming, becoming...

Have you shared your dreams with someone, someone you like & who
likes you,

someone who has your permission to hold you accountable,

someone who may every now and then approach you,
gently nudge you,

and say, *“How’s it going, friend? How can I help? What season
is your dream in?”*

Woody Allen said, *“If you want to make God laugh, tell him your
plans.”*

Disciples, let's dare to ask: What if it's the other way 'round?

What if the dream you cherish is actually God's plan for your life and for ours as well?

Imagine the power and the promise when your dream, your vision,
your hope and aspiration isn't you telling God your plans,
but rather a gift of plans from God!

Consider the Word from Genesis 37:

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." 8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

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The Holy Scriptures for today

 speak of God's dream for the salvation of a people, and
received by a servant;

 they speak of dreams shared and ill-received;

they speak of dreams tragically deferred
yet later fully realized for the
betterment of humankind.

Discover afresh the transformative power of big dreams.

Joseph had big dreams,
and he was not afraid to share them
even though those around him rejected and hated
him.

His brothers did not speak peaceably to
Joseph.

His father was upset and did not hide his
angst.

Even so, over the course of his life

Joseph lived into and pursued God's hope that had been given
to him.

College basketball coach Charles "Lefty" Driesell had big dreams,
so he engaged others in his vision,
and lived by these principles with regard to his team
members:

know them,
grow them,
inspire them,
involve them,
and reward
them.

Whose dreams have changed your life?

With whom do you need to share your own dreams and visions?

Following our dreams serves to connect us with whom we are meant
to become.

The Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke's tenet

is "*to dig deep (within yourself) to find a strong, simple 'I
must,'*

then build your life in accordance with it."

With the grace of God, find the 'I must' in your life.

With the help of God, build your life in accordance with it.

Start here, at the Lord's Table, by communing with Jesus Christ.
Tap into the power of the Holy Spirit whose will is for you to fulfill
your "I must"

as long as it is holy and uplifting,

and does not hurt nor abuse nor misuse the whole
people of God.

Begin afresh, in a loving community of faith

that truly wants to learn to know you, grow you,

inspire you, involve you, and reward you

(sometimes we are rewarded with more joy,

sometimes with more faith and friends,

*and, yes, sometimes with more
responsibilities!)*

The tragedy of dreams are those that are deferred, detoured,
diverted.

Unfulfilled dreams litter the highways and by-ways,

never having come to full fruition. And Jesus weeps.

"Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes

*What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore--
And then run? Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over-- like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?*

Genesis 37 begins with the tale of a young person telling others his dream,
brothers whose jealousy clouds their own vision and covers their compassion,
and then it suddenly, sadly, violently moves into a tale of attempted murder and human trafficking.

G.K. Chesterson said, *“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are the same people.”*

What do we make of the call to love when the ones we see the most act as enemies?

Joseph encounters jealousy, which grew into a conspiracy.

Angry siblings were unable or unwilling to envision or pursue an alternative to violence

What alternatives did they have before them? How about us?

As painful as jealousy is, this emotional response can be addressed.

Dr. Phil isn't the only soul who can help us deal with favoritism in the family dynamic.

Talk about sibling rivalries and get it out in the open.

Meanwhile his father Israel learned to love his sons only after he had had 10.

Joseph and Benjamin, sons 11 and 12, reaped the benefits of a father who showed his ability to love at a later stage in life.

As you may be aware, this is not uncommon experience in the human condition

when a parent waits until there are grandchildren before saying, "I love you"

Joseph was a tattletale, and he aimed to please.

Israel rewarded his young son's behavior, which encouraged it even more.

Consequently, his older brothers' anger at Joseph festered and, left unchecked, grew into hatred

The Bible says they could not speak peaceably to him.

Family issues that are ignored, swept under the rug,

put off for tomorrow what should be dealt with today, unresolved

Dysfunctional personal relationships can grow

to become dysfunctional public relationships.

You may say that the personal is not political, and I may agree with you,

yet the Holy Scripture before us reminds us that

when we see political and corporate wrongdoing

there are ample examples of when it could be traced backward

to personal problems which were ignored

or swept away for a rainy day...

Little issues, tiny sores that are not bandaged and treated,

can become so divisive

that they get played out on a larger scale, with
disastrous results.

The 37th chapter of Genesis points out

that dysfunctional relationships have a genesis,

but that does not mean they can't have a happy
ending.

Genesis 37 speaks plainly and forthrightly

of brothers plotting against their sibling, tossing him into a pit
to die,

and then selling him into slavery.

How can this ancient story relate to the modern human condition?

Are you like me, wrestling with the temptation

to deny and ignore today's cruelest, harshest realities?

Simply because we don't talk aloud about human trafficking

and slavery in the present tense

doesn't mean it isn't happening now, right here,

in our midst n Atlanta.

More people are enslaved in 2011 than there ever were

during the years of slavery in the USA.

Once upon a time slavery was sanctioned and a legal venture,

and – as hard as it may be to fathom – some people owned other people.

Today, even though slavery is not sanctioned, it has been driven underground.

Even though it is underground, it is as vicious and violent and – as ever.

“Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery.

It is an extreme form of labor exploitation

where women, men and children are recruited or obtained

and then forced to labor against their will

through force, fraud or coercion.

Trafficking victims are often lured by false promises of decent jobs and better lives.

The inequalities women face in status and opportunity worldwide

make women particularly vulnerable to trafficking.”[1]

There are more people enslaved, bought and sold and trafficked than ever before.

Georgia – and especially Atlanta – is an international hub of human trafficking.

According to the Governor’s Office for Children and Families,

each month in Georgia 242 girls are purchased by 7,200 men for 8,700 sex acts.

When one is enslaved or held captive or forced to work against one’s will,

then it is fair to say that victims are hampered

and denied the capacity

to live into the fulfillment of their dreams,

to fully enjoy life, liberty and the
pursuit of happiness.

The GNP of our fair city is economically enhanced by this trade.

We use products made by those who have been denied freedom and
human rights,

whether here or overseas.

*“It will shock most Americans to learn that the land of the free
is for some people really the home of the enslaved.
Just as it will shock most British people to learn that,
more than two centuries after William Wilberforce
led Parliament to abolish the slave trade,
some people are still enslaved in Britannia.*

Not all trafficking is for sexual exploitation.

*But when people are trafficked for other ends such as forced labor,
it leaves them highly vulnerable to sexual abuse as well.*

*As the victims of trafficking are usually society’s most vulnerable,
children are often victims.*

Children, today are trafficked for many purposes:

*as domestic helpers, agricultural laborers, for sports, for
war and for sex.”[2]*

We can be silent.

We can be a part of the problem.

Or we can be a part of the solution.

Today we call upon the Church of Jesus Christ

to confess our silence, complicity and negligence,

and to reclaim our moral and social responsibility.

We have, whether intentionally or not, participated in social injustice.

We have gained from our neighbor's losses,

including lost dreams, lost freedom, lost property, lost lands, lost lives.

We have profited from other people's pain and suffering.

We have been silent and still for too long.

No more.

No more.

We must shed light on this intensely dark issue.

We are called by our professed faith to break the chains that enslave and hold back.

We will not stand alone, although we would if need be.

We join with others who insist that every dream has a right to fulfill God's hope.

Let us join hands with our neighbors

in area churches and temples and community organizations

that are addressing this dream-deferring activity.

"A week ago a summit at Georgia State University

drew more than 400 attendees with speakers including Gov. Nathan Deal,

GBI Director Vernon Keenan,

state Attorney General Sam Olens

*and U.S. Attorney Sally Quillian
Yates,*

*along with representatives from several
nonprofit organizations.”[3]*

Here in Atlanta a coalition of churches and individuals called Street
Grace

is giving voice for the voiceless, raising awareness,

and hitting the streets and capital steps.

Decatur Cooperative Ministry – a ministry we helped found right here

–

provides safe homes and advocacy

for women and children and teens.

We can be a part of the solution, so that not one more dream is
deferred,

not one more soul is lost, stolen, or strayed.

We say the time has come to rise up and stand up

and speak up for the Josephs and Tamars of today.

May God’s words be upon our lips and give us the courage to speak
and act.

May God release us from the sins of our past and set us on a new path.

May our only priority be to follow God, and then, with grace, all will be made clear.

You know, Joseph sought to engage others in his dreams,
his vision of what might be.

His family could not, would not, did not share in his joy.

His brothers were angry and his father aghast.

Looking ahead in Genesis

we see that what began as a dream became a reality.

We see in the Bible that what started as an idea of community service
would one day save nations from starvation.

We see that in time and in another land

the whole family would be redeemed, saved, and grateful.

The whole family would be blessed to live into the seasons of their dreams.

May God's dreams for you come to full fruition,
and may you be blessed and a blessing.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra Material:

One raw windy day in spring, a snail started to climb a cherry tree.

Some birds in a nearby tree poked fun at the snail.

“Hey, you dumb snail,” squawked a bird, “where do you think you are going?”

Another bird laughed and said,

“Why are you climbing that tree when there aren’t any cherries on it?”

The snail kept moving and replied, *“By the time I get there, there will be.”*

[1] “Human Trafficking” American Civil Liberties Union, website.

[2] “Modern Enslavement” The Washington Times, website.

[3] “Human Trafficking Summit Explores Darker Side” Atlanta Journal-Constitution, August 1, 201