

Sermon Series Week 2: "Dream Big" July 10, 2016
Genesis 37:1-11 and 41: 8-12

This is the story of Jacob. The story continues with Joseph, seventeen years old at the time, helping out his brothers in herding the flocks. These were his half brothers actually, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought his father bad reports on them. Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was the child of his old age. And he made him an elaborately embroidered coat. When his brothers realized that their father loved him more than them, they grew to hate him - they wouldn't even speak to him. Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said, "Listen to this dream I had. We were all out in the field gathering bundles of wheat. All of a sudden my bundle stood straight up and your bundles circled around it and bowed down to mine." His brothers said, "So! You're going to rule us? You're going to boss us around?" And they hated him more than ever because of his dreams and the way he talked. He had another dream and told this one also to his brothers: "I dreamed another dream - the sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to me!" When he told it to his father and brothers, his father reprimanded him: "What's with all this dreaming? Am I and your mother and your brothers all supposed to bow down to you?" Now his brothers were really jealous; but his father brooded over the whole business.

[Years later when Joseph was a slave in Pharaoh's court] Pharaoh woke from another dream. When morning came, he was upset. He sent for all the magicians and sages of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but they couldn't interpret them to him. The chief wine steward then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, "I just now remembered something - I'm sorry, I should have told you this long ago. Once when Pharaoh got angry with his servants, he locked me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. We both had dreams on the same night, each dream with its own meaning. It so happened that there was a young Hebrew slave there with us; he belonged to the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams and he interpreted them for us, each dream separately.

A week ago Saturday, Elie [Elly] Wiesel [Veesel], a Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor died. He was a powerful voice for peace, and tolerance, and activism. One of his books was *Night* - required reading for most middle school students - about his experience in a Nazi concentration camp. Nazi camps were created to get rid of all people Hitler deemed unfit to live in, or to contribute to the building, of a Master Race.

There are three quotes of Elie Wiesel that seem very relevant to us - and to this time - in our country. The first is: "We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." The second is: "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest." And the third is: "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference."

These past weeks in our country have been a bad dream. On July 5th a black man named Alton Sterling was shot and killed by police in Louisiana, and the next day

another black man named Philando Castile was shot and killed by police in Michigan. That night five police officers were shot and killed during a demonstration in Texas. Not even a month ago 49 people were shot and killed in a gay nightclub in Orlando.

This month I begin a fifth year serving as your pastor. I'm preaching a sermon series called "Dream Big" and it comes with a memory verse. It's printed in your bulletin on page 3, and it's here, across the front of the sanctuary, for us to learn, to take to heart. Let's say it together, starting with where to find it: "Jeremiah 29:11. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you; plans to give you hope and a future."

Last Sunday I said that the theme of the United Methodist Family Camp I co-directed in June was "Dream Big" and it inspired me to create sermons around people in the bible who were dreamers, and who were part of God's dreams. Now many dreams lie in graves in Orlando, in Dallas, in Louisiana, in Michigan ... and I'm grieving. I'm grieving with a country that so recently celebrated our Independence Day; that we use our freedom to shoot and silence those we see as enemies; that we exercise our freedoms with hatred and intolerance and bigotry and privilege.

The bible is full of God's dreams... God's dreams to give us a future and hope. God's big dream was to be with us, to be one of us, to show us what love is. Jesus modeled for us God's inclusive love... a love so inclusive that it broke the Laws God had given Moses. The Law, Jesus showed us, always bows to love. On the cross, Jesus expressed forgiveness and understanding for those whose actions and inactions had nailed Him there. As His followers we're called to that same love and mercy Jesus showed.

We're called to dream God's dream that all of us are known as God's children, all of us are invited and included in dreaming God's dreams of a future with hope. Last Sunday we gathered around this table for Communion... and at this table we experienced just a taste of heaven, a vision of a table that's big enough for all of us to sit with the Father, with Jesus our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter.... with all the angels and with the saints who have gone before us. In the bread and the cup we tasted God's dream that we are one... one with God and one with each other. God's dream is that we'll gather and welcome all people at the Lord's Table, into the family of God.

Experiencing and expressing the radical love of Jesus Christ can save us from being disconnected from the world we live in, from being irrelevant... from being indifferent to the suffering of our brothers and sisters.

Last Sunday I said that one of my dreams for our congregation is that we will be like the redwood tree in the backyard of the parsonage. (And I said that if you come to "Backyard Worship" on Wednesday evenings you can sit underneath that tree.) My dream is that we'll put down deep roots, like that redwood tree, deep roots of love for God. I was asked yesterday, "What does it look like to be loved by God?" (Isn't that a great question?) I said that experiencing the love of God means that we believe that we

delight God, that we see ourselves as God's children, made in God's image. That we suspend self-criticism and self-judgment and believe that in Christ, God has chosen to make God's home... with us and in us. And that we see ourselves as bearers of God's dreams. Can you think of any better way to spend your time than experiencing God's love for you? To be one of God's dreamers... first put down deep roots of love for God.

The redwood tree in the backyard of the parsonage has wide branches. Last Sunday I said that my dream is that together we'll grow wider branches of compassion, mercy, tolerance, and service... in other words that we'll be Jesus... *His* compassion, *His* mercy, *His* acceptance, *His* service, and *His* love... to the world. I said that God's dreamers... bearers of God's dreams... are desperately needed in these times.

That was before Louisiana and Michigan and Dallas. Before it came home to me that the world is full of loss and longing and that the church needs to invite others... all others... to dream with us God's dreams of peace and unity and healing... of a future with hope... for all the world. And how we begin is by putting down deeper roots of love for God and growing wider branches of merciful love for others. We are called to dream God's dreams.

Joseph was a dreamer. We've heard two of stories from his life, and there's more to it than I can capture this morning, so I trust that you'll read more of Genesis this coming week, read more about Joseph. Joseph was a dreamer, his father's favorite son, and also kind of a goofball. Thank God for goofballs, for imperfect people whose stories are splattered across the pages of scripture, so we aren't comparing ourselves to automatons who lived flawless lives. Joseph, the 11th son in a family of 12 boys, was his father's favorite and everyone knew it.

Joseph's father had a special robe made for him. It was an elaborately beautiful robe, and it made his brothers angry and jealous. Joseph had big dreams and they got him in trouble because he was goofy enough to tell his brothers what he dreamed. He told them that in his dream they were harvesting grain and making bundles. Joseph said his bundle stood up straight and all his brothers' bundles bowed down before his! Imagine how that dream went over. Then Joseph told them that he had another dream where the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him.

One day the brothers were herding their sheep far from home when their father sent 17-year-old Joseph to check on them. When they saw Joseph coming, one of them said, "Let's kill him." But the oldest brother, Rueben said, "No, he's our brother." So they compromised, took the amazingly beautiful robe off Joseph and threw him into a pit. They were going to leave him there when a group of traders came by. The brothers decided they could get some money for him, so they lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him as a slave. (Eventually Joseph would end up in Egypt.) The brothers slaughtered a goat, dipped Joseph's robe into the blood and took it back to their father and told him that a wild animal had killed Joseph and taken his body. Joseph's father grieved for his son, the one his favoritism had spoiled. But those dreams Joseph had? Those were God's dreams.

Meanwhile Joseph had an interesting career in Egypt. He proved himself to be a leader and got a good job. Then he was thrown into prison because the Pharaoh's wife tried and failed to seduce him and told the Pharaoh that Joseph had been the seducer. While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh had two dreams that bothered him. He conferred with his advisors and wise men, but they couldn't help. Then his wine steward told him about Joseph who in prison interpreted a dream for him. Pharaoh sent for Joseph and asked him if could tell Pharaoh what his dreams meant. Joseph (who had grown wiser with time) said he didn't have the ability to interpret the dreams, but that God would reveal the meaning. So Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams. In the first, there were seven fat healthy cows that were eaten by seven thin straggly cows. In the second dream, seven good ears of corn were swallowed by seven straggly ears.

Joseph prayerfully discerned that the dreams meant that there would be seven years of good crops followed by seven years of drought and famine, and he advised Pharaoh to store some of the grain produced during the seven good years so that there would be grain to eat during the famine.

Pharaoh appointed Joseph as to be his manager. The drought was not only in Egypt but there was also little rain where Joseph's father and his brothers lived and they experienced famine. Word spread that Egypt had grain to sell and Jacob sent his sons there to buy grain. Imagine Joseph's surprise when his brothers bowed before him and asked to buy grain. Joseph's dream came true... And he saved not only Egypt but his family as well.

Joseph dreamed God's dreams and he got to experience them unfold in his life. Joseph suffered and he became compassionate... he became more Godlike... and he was able to carry more of God's dream... not just to save Egypt from famine, but to be reunited with his family, to be reconciled with his brothers, to love them, and to have compassion for them. God's dream of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, and peace, became Joseph's dream. Rather than getting even, or getting revenge, Joseph offered his brothers God's love.

Love is God's dream for us, and for the world. How big are your dreams? Are your dreams only about yourself? Do you have dreams about how you can serve our community, our country, and the world? Look beyond small ideas, a narrow vision of your future. Dream big about the plans God has for all the world... of hope and a future. Let's say our memory verse again... this time let's say it as a prayer, as an invitation for God to share God's dreams with us. "Jeremiah 29:11. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you; plans to give you hope and a future."