

**Christ Church Cranbrook**  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
Sermon for August 10, 2014 ~ Proper 14a  
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

About 40 years ago, a friend gave me a framed charcoal drawing that has haunted me almost daily ever since. The drawing is that of a man who appears to be looking right past you toward something in the distance. Whatever he is looking at seems to have captivated him. Beneath the drawing are these words from the Book of Genesis: "Behold, this dreamer cometh."

The drawing is a frequent reminder of the importance and the danger of dreams. Some say that because our defense systems are down during sleep, it is easier for God to speak to us and he does so through our dreams. Our dreams help us work out complicated problems of our daily life in the realm of the unconscious. Through our dreams we cope with our fears, wrestle with our demons, find reconciliation with our less loveable self, and experience inspirations that motivate us to move in new directions when we awaken.

There was a time, not so long ago, when people in Western civilization paid careful attention to their dreams and somehow knew how to interpret them in ways that helped guide their lives. It was a time less encumbered by notions of a scientific age that discounted such sources of information and depreciated the mysterious and the sacred. Although new science offers us hope of a new appreciation for those things, we find ourselves still in a world that is overly influenced by certain worn out notions of science and heavily dependent upon the material universe without adequate appreciation for the world of meaning and potential inherent in it. We find ourselves in a position of having to rediscover our latent ability to draw deeper meaning from the realm of the mysterious and numinous, something many of us seem to have lost or, at best, find illusive.

At any rate, when we return to the world described in the Bible's first book, we find characters who were understood to walk with God and converse with God and who received dreams from God that shaped their lives and even resulted in the salvation of the lives of others. Our lectionary gives only two Sundays to the story of Joseph, son of Jacob/Israel. In the Genesis account, the story is spread over 12 chapters. It is the story of God's mighty acts demonstrating how God preserved the family of Jacob/Israel and explaining how they came to find themselves in Egypt where later on they would become slaves.

Joseph was the favorite one of his twelve sons. He was the son of Jacob's later years, after he thought that he and Rachel, his favorite wife, might never have children. Rachel also adored Joseph. She may have kept him home longer than usual. By the time he was seventeen, Joseph was not yet well integrated into the work of the other boys in the field. He was a bit spoiled and could be a tattletale.

Joseph was also a dreamer, somewhat like his father, Jacob. Joseph was articulate, a real story-teller, who liked center stage. Later it would be revealed that he had charisma and leadership qualities that would set him apart.

Then there was the special robe - a robe with long sleeves - sometimes referred to as "the coat of many colors." It was a gift that indicated that his father, Jacob, considered Joseph his real heir - the heir of his heart. In terms of religious faith, it appears that Joseph would be the bearer of the ancestral promise - the promise that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of descendants, land and being a blessing. He is certainly given the spotlight in the Bible!

His father sent him out to join his brothers while they were pasturing the sheep. When his brothers saw him coming that day, they said, "Behold, this dreamer cometh," or, in the language of today's text, "Here comes this dreamer." They said this because of two dreams Joseph had shared with them. In the dream, the twelve of them were out in the field harvesting wheat and binding it into sheaves. Suddenly, his sheaf rose up and the sheaves of the other brothers bowed down to it. In the other dream, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to him. They were all offended by the implication that he would reign over them. Joseph was clueless as to the potential danger of sharing such dreams with his family. In time, as we will see in next week's reading, everyone discovers that they had all misinterpreted the meaning of the dream. The bowing was actually in gratitude to Joseph for actions that spared his family from famine, in spite of what they had done to him. An act of mercy and grace. An experience of salvation. A story of divine providence that has been retold for a thousand generations.

What can we learn from today's portion of the story? We might find in it a source of encouragement to pay better attention to our dreams. It might prompt us to begin asking God in our bedtime prayers to reveal himself and his divine aspirations for us through our dreams. We also might find in the story a reminder that dreams are a gateway into the mysterious realm of our psyche where we are as likely to encounter darkness as we are to see light. And in those encounters there is a possibility for us to find ways to find love and redemption for those parts of us that we loathe so much we drive them underground, trying to forget them. Yet from that darkness, unloved and unacknowledged, they find means of expression that produce in us some nasty traits. We might be cautioned by this story that dreams are not always properly understood, either by ourselves or by others. In fact, dreams and dreamers can be intimidating or threatening to others, particularly those who are insecure and those who have a death grip on the status quo. Perhaps the insecurity and the stasis come from lack of attention to dreams of their own, or from shattered dreams, or from the terrors of their own worst nightmares. Whatever the case, dreams have to be carefully handled and dreamers must remember that others are not always thrilled about their dreams.

There are several parallels with the story of Jesus in the story of Joseph that we may notice if we read it carefully. Both had a unique status. Their betrayers had the same name. They were put in a hole from which they emerged to become saviors. Being a dreamer may mean becoming a savior of others. But to accomplish that feat, one most likely will have to experience loss of life, exile in a strange land and culture, and be far more generous, merciful, and forgiving than can be imagined. God's plans are not our plans and God's ways are not our ways. Trusting God's plans and God's ways leads us into new territories. Things happen along the way that we don't like and we have to continue to live trusting in God to get us through to where God wants us to be. And when we look back upon the journey, we may be able to say with Joseph that what others meant for harm, God meant for good.

So ask God to give you dreams. Be aware that dreams have power in your life and decisions. Understand that others may not like your dreams, but pursue them anyway, trusting in God, attempting to be patient with those around you, and confident that, as St. Paul reminds us, "In all things, God works for good for those who are called according to his purpose."

Will our faith be enough? Again, as St. Paul says, "Those who trust in God will never be put to shame." And we can take a quick lesson from today's Gospel reading. Peter's faith falters, but does Jesus let him sink? No, even though Peter's faith in Jesus is weak, Jesus' faith in Peter is strong and he reaches out a hand to save him. We are to dream our dreams and then use every bit of faith we have to bring them to reality with the help of God whose dream for a redeemed creation includes our participation.