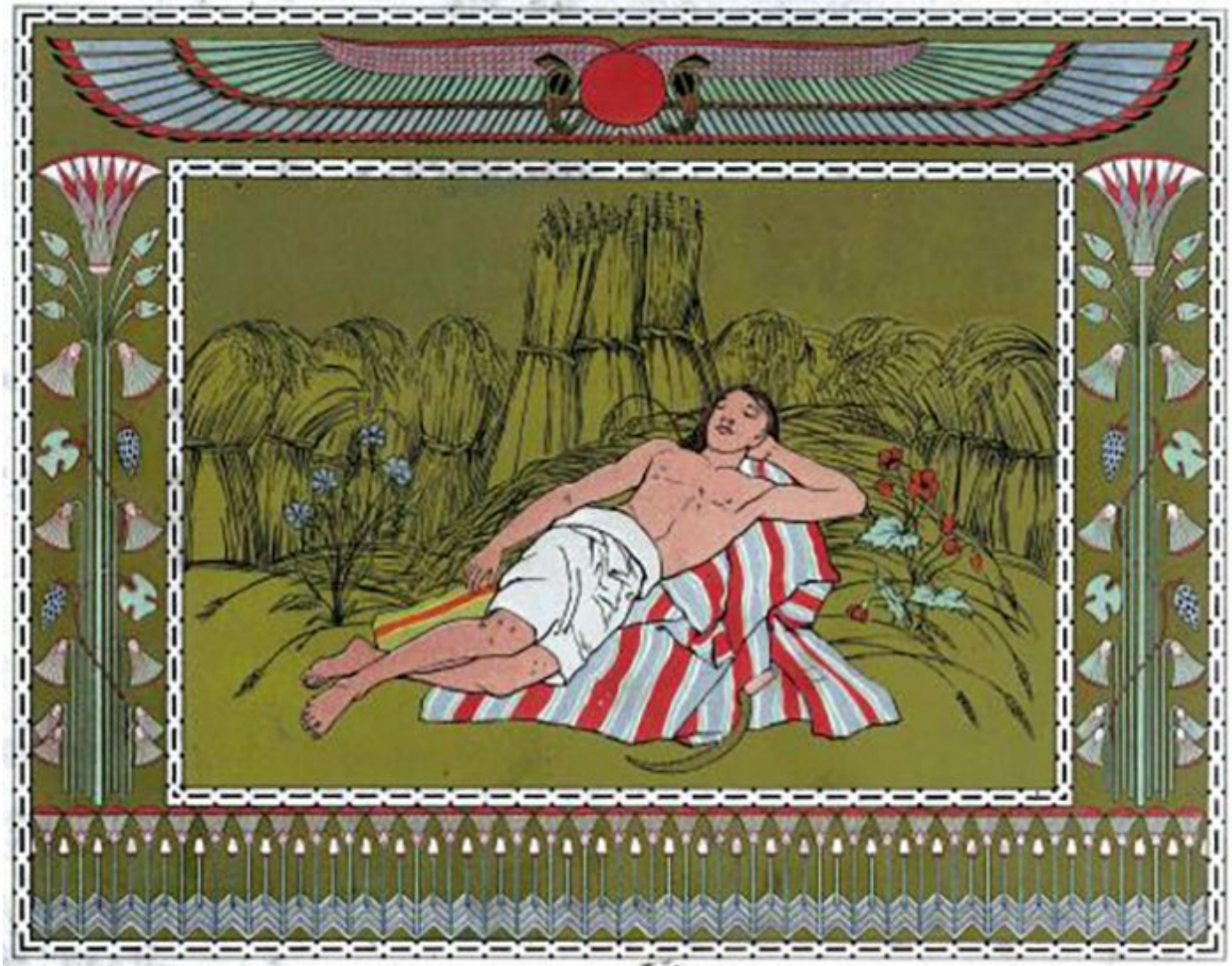


Squashing the Dreamers

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Preaching on:
Genesis 37:1–28

Joseph is young. Joseph is favored by his father (Jacob now also known as Israel). He wears outlandish clothes for a shepherd. But worst of all, Joseph is a dreamer. And this is the crime that his brothers can't forgive him for. And so they decide together to squash the dreamer.

Why? Why'd they do it? Now, the story seems to offer us a lot of little reasons, right? Joseph is different, he's daddy's favorite, our mom didn't like his mom, he's a tattletale... but ultimately it all comes down to his dreams. "Here comes this dreamer," they say to one another. "Come now, let us kill

him...and we shall see what becomes of his dreams.” It’s the dream, as much as the dreamer that threatens them. Squash the dreamer, they think, and you can squash the dream.

In our world today, we might say, “It was just a dream,” right? A dream is just the accidental experience of your brain processing the previous day’s data, we might say. That’s one really good way to squash the dream, typically modern—basically, dreams don’t even exist, stupid.

But that option isn’t available to Joseph’s brothers. They know the power of dreams, but they don’t trust that power. Because they can’t control it, they don’t have it, and they fear the power of the person who does. Our translation this morning reads, “Here comes this dreamer...” but another way to translate it is, “Here comes the master of dreams.” Squash the dreamer, and maybe you can squash the very power of dreams. And once you’ve exiled that visionary, forward-looking power out of your life, then (hopefully) you’re back in control of things. But Joseph’s story tells us that the exact opposite is true.

To the brothers, it seems like Joseph thinks he special, and he’s dreaming of his own greatness, at their expense. They think that Joseph wants to dominate them. In fact, (because most of us know the story of *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*) we know that Joseph’s dream is actually calling him to spare his brothers, to forgive and serve them, and to save his family after he becomes Pharaoh’s highest-ranking commander and his brothers come to Egypt in search of food during a devastating famine.

But none of them, not even Joseph, understand the dream yet. They’ve got a vision, but they don’t have the message yet. So often, we want the message first. We want the business plan, first. And then from that sober message, we can draw out a vision, a dream, to add a little pop to our presentation. But that’s not how it works. The dream comes to us from we don’t know where. We’re not in control of it. It’s bigger than us. It comes from God. Maybe we hear the dream from that weird guy in the weird robe who doesn’t act like everybody else. And so his brothers conspire to squash the dreamer.

At first, they want to kill Joseph. But they can’t quite do it. That’s a truth about dreams. You can kill a dreamer, but you can’t kill the dream. The dream is way bigger than the dreamer. So, they imprison him and then they exile Joseph into slavery to Egypt. But again, we know it doesn’t work. And that’s another truth about dreams. A dream can’t be “cast out.” A dream can only be “brought forth.” Jesus, in the Gospel of Thomas, famously says, “If you bring forth what is within you, what is within you will save you. If you don’t bring forth what is in you, it will destroy you.”

Joseph is his family’s vision. He is the visionary of the Israelites. In fact, in the Quran, when Joseph’s brothers tell their father that Joseph is dead, he weeps so hard that he goes blind. And I think we could also think of Joseph as a symbol of the vision of the Church.

Do we have a dream? Do we have a vision of the future that we're bringing forth? If the answer is maybe, kind of, not really, not sure, or if the answer is a backwards looking answer, rather a forward-looking answer—a vision for the future, then the story of Joseph and his brothers has some strong warnings for us.

The Israelites' dreamer—their visionary, their artist, their imaginal connection to God's plan, Joseph—becomes the enslaved dream interpreter of a foreign power. Joseph doesn't dream in Egypt, he interprets the dreams of Pharaoh. And rather than being the visionary leader of his family, Joseph becomes an administrator for the vision of Egypt. The power of the dream is always going to land somewhere. The Church can lead with vision, or all the other great powers of the world will pick off our young visionaries and make them administrators of their dreams.

This also happens to us as individuals. You can follow your dreams, or you can work for the dreams of others. For most of us this is a compromise in life, but no matter what we do to pay the bills, we should hold on to our own vision for ourselves.

So my question for you this morning, beloved, is, Do you have a dream? Is our church a landing place for God's vision for the future? Or are we a place that squashes the dreamers?

I think we have a dream here. And we're in the beginning phases of articulating it. And we're maybe a little shy, we're a little worried about rocking the boat too much, sticking our necks out too far. And we worry about wrapping everything up with a pretty bow, we worry about making a case that's unsinkable. And that's wise, of course. But it's also wise to remember that before the interpretation comes the dream. All of us need to make space within ourselves and space for others to have an imperfect, not yet fully understood, kinda weird dream. That's the way forward, I think. Start with a dream and don't rush to a perfect plan. Follow the dream. It is bigger than you. It is bigger than our plans.

Speaking of supporting the young dreamers of the church. I'm really happy that later this afternoon, we're holding a final interview for the position of Youth Ministry Coordinator. The YMC will be coordinating jr. high and sr. high youth group activities for five local churches. *How's that going to work?* I honestly don't know all the details. But we've got five churches and a wonderful candidate for the job who are simply willing to follow the dream of having programming for our young people. I have no idea what we'll have a year from now. But we and four other churches are going to follow the dream into the future. Of course, we'll all fondly remember the youth groups of the past. And I'm sure many of you have all kinds of stories and advice to share. And we need that as we follow this dream to wherever it leads, and as we do everything we can to support the dreams and the faith formation of our young people.

Why couldn't Joseph's brothers support his dream, follow it to whatever conclusion it was going to

come to naturally without trying to kill it? Ultimately, they fell into a trap that we often fall into too, which is to believe that the dream serves the dreamer. It's so strange that we think that because dreams are often a real pain for the dreamer. They were for Joseph. They were for MLK. They were for Gandhi. They were for Philip K. Dick, and for Jesus, and for so many other dreamers and visionaries, who suffer greatly for having and sharing dreams. In fact, the true dream rarely serves the dreamer. Instead, it serves the community. It's a calling—a calling not just to the future but to the service of others in that future.

So may we be a community that makes space for dreams. May we be willing to follow dreams even when we don't fully understand where they'll lead us. May we nurture the young dreamers among us, knowing that their visions are gifts for all of us. The future belongs to the dreamers. Our job is to listen, to make room, and to walk faithfully with them. The dreamers show us the way forward. They connect us to God's vision. Beloved, don't let anyone take that away from you—from us. The dream is so much bigger than we can see.