

May 17, 2020
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Title: Troubling Dreams
Text: Daniel 2:1-2, 26



The last several weeks we have heard stories from the first book of the Bible. That's Genesis. In Genesis, we met Jacob and Joseph- fathers of the first generations of the nation of Israel. Now we are skipping forward about 3,000 years. Near the end of the Hebrew bible, to read another dream folktale from the Jewish tradition - that has a familiar ring to it. The author of Daniel speaks of God as "the Revealer of Mysteries." May we hear what the Revealer of Mysteries may say to us today.

The King files into a violent rage when his assembly of advisors are unable to tell him what he wants to hear. He ordered them all literally torn into pieces when they fail to meet his demands. It's hard for a ruler to assemble a strong leadership team under these circumstances. Whenever the king's servants speak the truth, the king cuts off their heads. Then, a stranger accepts the challenge and delivers.

Let me give you some context for this particular king's story. This is 3,000 years after Joseph stories from our previous weeks. Jewish authors write folklore of a 'new' Joseph - they named Daniel who also received messages from God in dreams. As the Hebrew scriptures draws near an ending, the Daniel story is given as a parallel to the Joseph stories from their beginning. In the 3,000 years span the distance between Daniel and Joseph, the Hebrews went from a wandering nomadic people to building a great nation. It only lasted for about a 100 years before their empire collapsed. Everything we read in the Hebrew Bible pretty much after Psalms speaks to the problems of injustice and inequality. It tells how the nation fell due to the exploitation of the poor within their own nation. Then foreign empires conquered the divided people. Jewish people became exiles, removed from their homeland, taken away from promise of God and the in-dwelling of God at their temple. This is the biblical story. This story (like the rest) speaks to the social and political realities of exile and empire domination.

It is written by Jewish authors when many Jews were killed or sold into slavery, the Temple was violated, and Jewish traditional worship practices were banned. Even as the Jewish people were being oppressed by foreign rulers, the Jewish communities were also in conflict with one another.

Into this crisis, the story is told of Daniel - the hero figure presenting a new Joseph bringing words from God to a hurting people. Ancient people accepted revelations from God though dreams. Documented throughout the biblical stories, if God had something to say to the people - someone usually had a dream. Ancient people understood that their religious and national leaders received visions / dreams from God. Post-enlightenment negated such things. In modern times, we do not expect our political leaders to chart a nation's course from the content of their nocturnal dreams. Any who might claim to do so would receive our suspicion and ridicule no doubt.

Contemporary psychology is teaching us that dreams are important sources of useful information. From them we learn something of ourselves, our fears, our desires and our possibilities which lie rooted in our subconscious state. In this sermon series, I have shared some foundations of Dream interpretation. I have said that only you can interpret your

dreams because your dream was sent to you, to teach you something about yourself, for your growth. Only you know all the bits and pieces (consciously or unconsciously) of your life to which your dream is speaking. You must be the interpreter. I have also shared that you are everything in your dream. You are all the people and objects and animals in your dream. Our subconscious is quite sophisticated in playing with symbols and using them so creatively to send us messages in our dreams. We must work to decipher them.

Daniel is the archetype hero. He is an Israelite. He is one of the subjected class, but he has gained favor in this foreign empire where they are exiled, and he has risen in the ranks to become part of the king's court. (very much like Joseph story) Daniel utters words - just like Joseph- telling the king that 'no wise man can explain to the king the mystery of his dream, but the God of Heaven, the revealer of Mysteries will- and does.'

Daniel boldly tells the king his dream and its meaning. Daniel tells the king, you are the tree in your dream, the tree will be cut down. The king's reign will end. Now, to tell that to a king who has already threatened to dismember the wise men, might not be such a wise move. Daniel speaks nonetheless. He tells the ruler that The king- and any earthly kingdoms of power and domination - will fall. Earthly nations of greed and massacre and slavery will be destroyed. God will reign instead, and God will not rule by violence or oppression.

Daniel provides the interpretation given to him for the king's dreams. While we must find our own meaning in our own dreams, that does not mean that we cannot have assistance. We can join a dream group to share with one another and ask probing questions for one another. We can help the dreamer unpack his/her dream. Dream groups do not impose an interpretation on another's dream, but we listen, guide and suggest ideas. We can also work with a spiritual director on opening our dream letters from God. A spiritual director can offer those same gifts of listening, guiding, prompting that may help the dreamer understand and make meaning. A spiritual director prays for guidance to assist the directee like Daniel did for the king. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit, God, the Revealer of the Mysteries who will provide the understanding and revelations.

so, whether we do that process on our own, or with a group, or with a director, it is God who gives the dreams and God who reveals the meaning.

Daniel prays for the mysteries to be revealed and that he may save the lives of those the king has threatened to kill. Daniel tells the king Nebuchadnezzar that his dreams are of an alternative reality in which God reverses present conditions.

The Jewish authors - living in exile - write the story of Daniel, while 'in the 'shadow of the empire'. The disenfranchised people dream of liberation. A message for the oppressed is delivered in Daniel: do not settle for the status quo. Do not settle for the world as it is being presented to us. Do not settle for a world in which the rich hoard wealth and the poor must line up for food distribution. Do not settle for a world in which skin color reduces life expectancy. Do not settle for mad raging kings to rule unchecked. We can hope for more than this. God's justice, love and good will triumph.

Daniel presents this alternative story giving his people hope and because we believe this to be true and certain as well we can live courageously now, and craft with courage a better future. A question we might ponder is whether these dreams of an end to human exploitation - these dreams of a just and equal society -if these God's dreams can be liberated from our dreamland and break into reality? May our dreams give us this hope to so believe. May our dreams give us this courage to so act. Amen.