

Those Who Dream.....Are Not Alone!
Luke 1: 26-38
Jon Frost

Dreamers are unreliable witnesses. I came across this phrase in an article this week and it has stuck with me. As you may or may not know, throughout this Advent season we have been drawing upon the theme "Those Who Dream." Each week our candle lighting liturgy includes statements beginning with the phrase "I dream of," and they have longed for everything from snow days to empty beds in jail cells as they follow the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

The title of this theme comes from the first verse of Psalm 126, which says, "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream." The texts we've encountered have urged us to keep watch and stay awake, and they've highlighted the stories of particular dreamers, like Mary and Elizabeth, as they begin to catch a glimpse of God's dreams for the world now breaking into their midst.

We heard part of Mary's story last week as she visited her cousin Elizabeth and burst into song. Today's lesson immediately precedes that part of the story as Mary is visited by an angel. It's a story we've likely heard many times before. Nevertheless, I came across an insight this week into something I had never noticed before. The angel Gabriel says to Mary, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

The next verse indicates that Mary was perplexed - not at the fact that a messenger of God was talking to her. It was not Gabriel's presence that mystified her. It was Gabriel's words, his greeting. Favored one, he said to her. The Lord is with you. You see, Luke introduces Mary to us in a very subtle but powerful way. With every other person we meet in these birth narratives - Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, as well as Simeon and Anna who we'll meet next week - Luke presents them to the reader with reference to their family of origin, their character, or both.

It is as if to say this is what qualifies them for their role in the story.

They are part of this notable family or they were blameless before the Lord. Not so with Mary. There are no accolades. No family history mentioned. She is simply presented as a young girl, perhaps poor, living in an insignificant town well outside the centers of religious and political power. Favored one. Really? How? The Lord is with me? Did she doubt? Can angels be sarcastic? Or was this what she had always dreamed was true but couldn't quite believe it?

Some describe Gabriel's greeting to Mary as a naming ceremony. He gives her a new name - favored one - a name which decisively supplants whatever less favorable names

Mary has believed about herself. I like this line of thinking because it invites us to consider this encounter between Mary and Gabriel as a call story, deserving of inclusion in the pantheon of biblical call stories. Like those other call stories, Mary is given a vocation; a particular task in response to this surprising and gracious initiative of God. She will bear a son but not just any son. He will be great, He'll be called Son of the Most High, He will take up the throne of David his ancestor and His kingdom will last forever.

Now, this is a pretty amazing juxtaposition. When it comes to Israel's monarchy, there is perhaps no greater figure than David. Man after God's own heart and all. Defeats giants. Handsome fella. In spite of his flaws and questionable decisions, he is the gold standard as far as Israel's kings go. Gabriel's words about a kingdom without end sound a lot like God's covenant with David in the book of 2nd Samuel 7. In that somewhat comical episode, David feels badly that he's living comfortably in lavish accommodations while the ark of God remains in a tent. So, yeah, he thinks, we should probably get God a house too.

God's response is essentially "that's not how this works. You don't build me a house; I will establish my own dwelling, thank you very much."

But God does go on to promise to establish David's throne forever. But as you read the rest of 2nd Samuel into 1st and 2nd Kings you find that it doesn't end well for the monarchy. It ends not in glory but in exile. It plays out pretty much exactly how God had warned when Israel first asked to have a king so they could be like other nations. In a sense, they got what they wished for.

One wonders how alive the hopes for a Davidic king could possibly have been after multiple empires had come and gone, all of them keeping the people of Israel firmly under their feet. Why not just scrap this prophetic word? Well, quite simply, it survived, like a just barely flickering candle flame, because God said it. And now, generations later, Gabriel echoes these same words to Mary.

However, God subverts the fulfillment of the promise. God had warned Israel against having a human king but they went ahead with it anyhow. In choosing a human king, they rejected the God who brought them out of Egypt. And now, when the glory days are but a distant memory Gabriel announces, "your king is coming." But he will be a king unlike any you've seen. He won't rule with the power of swords and spears, but with justice and compassion. God will provide an heir to David's throne, but not through male succession. Jesus enters the world when through God's spirit God aligns with the creative power of motherhood and pregnancy. God establishes God's dwelling place in the womb of an unwed teenager.

Greetings favored one. The Lord is with you. God's promise to David, to Mary, to all of us, arrives precisely in the fullness of our messy, broken, and beautiful lives. As we watch this video from Work of the People, I invite you to ponder what it would feel like to hear God speak words of grace and favor into your life. What are the things you are holding that need to feel the breath of God's love? What would it feel like to believe deep in your heart that God is with you? ([Watch video](#))

Work of the People Video Transcript

I am with you. In our pain, our blue, our beautiful, our hard, our messy, our ugly, our struggles, and our joys, God is with us.

God accompanying us; God alongside us; God amid us. God among us; God beside us; God by us; God including us; God near us; God plus us; God upon us. God as companion to us; God side by side us. God in the thick of us; in the thick of our humanity; in the middle of this weary world, God is with us. In the gift and in the muck and mire of real life we are called to be present, to be in-the-flesh with one another. Accompanying others; alongside others; amid others; beside others; by others; for others, including others; near others; a companion to others; side by side with others; in the thick of others; God with us. Us with others; God, with the world in the thick of the beautiful, and the messy. In that, a weary world rejoices.

Dreamers are unreliable witnesses. I couldn't stop thinking about this phrase. The Psalmist wrote "When God restored our fortunes, we were like those who dream." But for those who cannot see the dream, the testimony may seem unreliable or impossible and the details of the dream seem so out of place in "normal life." I mean, have you ever tried to describe one of your dreams to someone the next day? You were downhill skiing with a group of penguins...and you were fluent in French? But what if others had the same dream?

In this Advent season, and especially in these opening chapters of Luke's Gospel, we encounter dreamers tuned in to the strange and surprising reality of the world God is making new in Christ. And that strange world is one in which love reigns.

In her poem entitled "After Annunciation" Madeleine L'Engle writes these words.

This is the irrational season
When love blooms bright and wild.
Had Mary been filled with reason
There'd have been no room for the child.

Mary discovers that God is with her and also that her cousin Elizabeth is catching the same dream of God's love breaking through into this weary world. Followers of Jesus ever since have discovered the same; that we are not alone. God is with us. And that is grace enough for these days but God is with us even as we are sent into the world to be with others, to incarnate the love and grace and favor of God, helping others catch the dream. In the name of God the original dreamer, Jesus, the dream come true and the Holy Spirit who enables us to be those dreams.

Amen.

Resources

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