



LAKESWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Katie Robb

December 4, 2011

**The Lovers, the Dreamers, and Me**

Matthew 2:7-15

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

I've got Muppets on the brain this Advent season.

I maybe always do, a little bit, for I stand firmly in the midst of a Muppet generation.

I haven't ever really figured out if I'm Gen X or Gen Y,  
but I know for certain that I'm Gen Muppet.

I remember being so excited for the Muppet Show to come on Sunday nights as a kid.

The favorite Christmas album in our house (a record, no less) was A Very Muppet Christmas,

So much so that I only hear Miss Piggy's when anyone sings about those "5 GOLD RINGS."

Piggy and Gonzo and Animal and Fozzy and even those grumpy old critic guys -

They are characters burned into my understanding of the world.

Archetypes of my era.

And Kermit.

Oh Kermit!

When I went to go see *The Muppets* last weekend in the theatre,

It was like seeing an old friend.

Kermit.

And his worries and his relationships and that crazy head-shaking thing he does when he's frazzled.

That Muppet movie revived the child and helped me believe in what the world does right again.

Like a child does.

Seriously, all of this, from Kermit and friends.  
 And if you are not part of Gen Muppet, I'm sorry.  
 But I hope you are at least a little bit familiar with Kermit the frog.  
 If you don't know him, you would like him. I promise.  
 He's the one who sings the song, "The Rainbow Connection."  
 You know, the one about not giving up on the dream about what's on the other side,  
 Not thinking rainbows are just illusions or fairy tales?  
 That what we dream about really means something?  
 That's Kermit.  
 "Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection...  
 The lovers, the dreamers, and me."

Maybe he's talking about "magic," which is not exactly what we talk about here in church.  
 But it's a lot like that.  
 Believing in things we cannot see.  
 Believing in something bigger than ourselves.

He's calling us to catch a vision, Kermit,  
 Not to ignore our hope, to believe in what might be hugely possible,  
 Even if it seems far-fetched.  
 He's calling us to be dreamers.

Now Joseph, he's a dreamer.  
 In fact, the Bible is not short on dreamers.  
 In just a few sentences from Matthew in our reading today,  
 We have reference to multiple dreams.  
 The wise men were "warned in a dream not to return to Herod" and thereby protect the infant Jesus.  
 And an angel appeared to Joseph "in a dream"  
 warning him of Herod's search, and directing him to take the baby to Egypt.  
 To protect the infant savior.

Sadly, Biblical dreams are not all rainbows.

First, in chapter one of Matthew's gospel,  
 An angel comes to him in a dream  
 Said angel advises Joseph not to dismiss Mary, his betrothed,  
 Even though she is pregnant before their wedding.  
 The angel tells him the child is "of the Holy Spirit"  
 And will "save his people from their sins."  
 You can only imagine his thought process, right?

But he listens to that voice.  
 He does not dismiss her,  
 But takes her to Bethlehem under not the best circumstances  
 And the child is born.

And if that's not enough,

Another angel comes to him telling him the savior child,  
The one he knows is not his,  
Is in danger from King Herod and now he has to go to Egypt.

I'm thinking he thought something like:  
"Egypt???  
With a BABY????  
Now???  
Seriously, angel, have you ever travelled with a NEWBORN BABY?"

Depending on where they stayed in Egypt, that's a journey of around 250 miles.  
Without wheels.  
He'd been through a few things already.  
Maybe he thought he had done his job on behalf of the Spirit.  
But no, it's not over, the baby is born,  
And there is still danger,  
Still hardship.

THIS is the dream?

And yet, Joseph, he not only listens, he GOES.  
He packs Mary and Jesus up takes them to Egypt.

Hearing these words to do with dreams and Joseph and Egypt,  
It's hard not to think of the Joseph of the Old Testament.  
The one who became the dream interpreter for Pharaoh,  
Foretelling the destabilizing of that rich and powerful empire.<sup>1</sup>

It's hard not to think of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt,  
And their liberation and exodus to Israel.

But Joseph, on God's guidance, seeks safety in Egypt.  
This place is the refuge, the hiding spot of God's child.

Egypt at the time of Jesus' birth was quite a different place than during Moses' time.  
It was no longer a place of Hebrew servitude,  
But a common place of refuge for those seeking safety in unstable lands.  
Egypt was stable and fertile land,  
Outside of the political control of Herod.

The writer of the gospel tells us this journey to Egypt happened to fulfill scripture,  
As the prophet Hosea said, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."  
But Hosea was recalling Israel as God's son, Israel's call out of Egypt in the Exodus.  
Matthew is the only gospel writer who makes reference to this story, to Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 41:14-24

And it's just not clear if it was written in for effect—  
some kind of proof-text for Jesus being the Messiah,  
or if the young family really fled to Egypt.

We don't always know if the facts are right.  
What we do know is that the Bible speaks truth,  
And the TRUTH here is that Jesus was born into a world of danger,  
Where the powers that be were afraid of God's power,  
And JOSEPH responded in faith by protecting that child with God's help.  
So Egypt or otherwise, Joseph protected his vulnerable and special family from Herod's threat.

Joseph played his role, responding to the voice of the angel in his dream.  
More than once, he was given a challenging task in a dream.  
More than once, he accepted it.  
He had been told this child would save people from their sins.  
Told he was conceived of the Holy Spirit.  
Told he was Emmanuel – God with Us  
And he had seen the child, seen how the shepherds and angels and wise men had come.  
Joseph had caught the vision and was ready to play his role.

And I wonder if we would do the same.

Are we versed enough in the old prophecies?  
In the promises of God, to catch the vision and play our own roles?  
Are we listening to the dreams that guide us?  
Or blowing them off as subconscious brain dumps?

Knowing that Christmas will come again.  
Knowing that Easter will come again.  
Knowing of God's saving work in the world,  
Are we waiting for a Messiah the way the Joseph and Mary were?  
With expectation?  
With minds that would believe something outrageous?  
With spirits that would hear the voice of angels in our dreams?  
The guidance of the Holy Spirit?  
With hearts willing to go through the trouble the Spirit might cause us?

Can we be like Joseph?  
Or are we too skeptical?

When we hear Isaiah's prophecy...  
The lion and the lamb...  
Swords into plowshares...  
On the day we light the candle of peace...  
Do we really catch the vision?  
Dream the dream?  
Or just accept that war will always be and go on with our petty grievances and rivalries...

Do we have HOPE?  
 Real HOPE that there will be better days?  
 That the world would begin again on Christmas.  
 That God-With-Us means something.

It seems to me that along with the candles of hope and peace and joy and love,  
 We ought to light a candle of dreams,  
 For how did Mary know?  
 How did Joseph know?  
 How did the wise men know?  
 The prophecies spoke.  
 They knew their traditions and God's promise of a Messiah.  
 But they also knew enough to listen,  
 To hear a word from God in their dreams.

Advent is about waiting.  
 And it's about dreaming.  
 But it's not about being dead asleep.  
 It's about having hearts open enough to believe in God's dream,  
 It's about having minds open enough to see salvation in our midst,  
 And being willing to play our role to keep it alive,  
 Safe from the threats of those who fear its power to change the world.

How do we read this story through the eyes of our Advent waiting?  
 "Let us begin Advent, waiting.  
 Not the "going back to sleep" kind of waiting.  
 Not the impatient pacing, or the wasted anxiety of waiting.  
 Not even the passive-aggressive waiting that says, "Really? We'll see."

Let us begin Advent, waiting.  
 Getting up and joining the adventure,  
 Even when we don't know where it will take us.  
 Shifting the impatient waiting to expectant living.  
 Boldly claiming the Good News that we know will come.  
 Waiting with joy as we reach out with the grace of God that is so much more than amazing.

Let us begin Advent."<sup>2</sup>

Let us begin Advent like old Kermit and The Rainbow Connection.  
 The lovers, the dreamers, and me.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Michelle Thomas-Bush @ d365.org

