

Text: Micah 4: 2-7  
Title: God's Dream  
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*I am indebted to a lecture by Marcus Borg helping set me on this path and for this way of framing the dream or passion of God.*

In 1995 Dr. Cornelius Plantinga turned a line from a popular movie into the title for a celebrated book about sin. The line is lifted from "The Grand Canyon." Early in the movie a tow truck driver, played by Danny Glover, intervenes in a car jacking. The moment is tense, the street is deserted, and five young thugs have surrounded the car, but Danny Glover takes the leader of the criminals aside and says:

*Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I am supposed to be able to do my job without asking you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you ripping him off. Everything is supposed to be different than what it is here.*

Plantinga entitled his book "Not the Way it's Supposed to Be." In a world of terrorism and genocide and war and depression and loneliness and addiction and violence and abuse and pollution and whatever else you read in this morning's paper....

Everything is supposed to be different than what it is.

Clearly something is amiss; this is not the intention of a benevolent Creator.

But, even as that is true, how can we know what God's intention is for creation?

What is God's picture for the way things are supposed to be?

Or, maybe better said: What is God's dream for creation?

Not dream as the whispery elusive shadows of sleep.

Not dream as the Chicago Cubs getting into the World Series.

But, what is God's dream ~ as God's passion, as God's deep desire for this world?

If this is not the way it's supposed to be then what can we know about the way it is supposed to be?

Walter Brueggemann suggests that we can look to the Bible for that picture. He writes that we can expect scripture to open for us the imagination of God. In his words:

*I have come to the rather simplistic notion that imagination is the capacity to image a world beyond what is obviously given. That is the work of poets and novelist and artists ~ and that is what biblical writers mostly do. I think that is why people show up at church. They want to know whether there is any other world available than the one we see, which we can hardly bear...*

That is what I invite you to consider this morning.

What is the imagination of God for a world beyond what is obviously given?

Now, much of scripture was written from the underside of oppression. Whether in Egyptian slavery, or Babylonian captivity, or Roman occupation, most the Bible was formed under systems of domination. The writers of scripture knew the pressure of Pharaoh's thumb, and the desolation of being displaced, and the imprint of the Emperor's boot. And, from that place of oppression, prophets and poets and gospel writers and apostles proclaimed

an alternative vision,  
a narrative of opposition,  
a different story than the story that the people knew.

One way to read the Bible is as an alternative story to the way things are...

And the laws of God, the Torah, give that alternative story shape and structure.  
And the prophets advocate for that alternative vision. They rail against failing to live into that vision, point to consequences of that failing, and capture the hope of that vision.  
And eventually Jesus heralds and embodies that alternative kingdom.  
And that gets him killed.

This text in Micah is an example of the dream of God.

It is almost identical to a passage in Isaiah. The lines about the mountain of the Lord, and the settling of disputes, and the transformation of swords and spears to implements of life are nearly the same. Many scholars believe it was a familiar saying, or song, or symbol that both prophets wove into their prophecy.

It is a remarkable picture! Nations stream to God to learn the way of God, conflicts are settled, peace is built, the schools that train for war are closed, and people live settled, sustainable, and secure lives. But, what I particularly like is the image of every person sitting under their own vine and having their own fig tree.

*Everyone will sit under their own vine  
and under their own fig tree,*

It's a picture that implies equity ~

There is a shared justice with no exclusion of nation, tribe, or tongue.

It's a picture that implies protection ~

Everyone will be under a sheltering shade, safe from the hot midday sun.

It's a picture that implies ownership ~

This is not the vine of servants, slaves, or sharecroppers, but everyone has their own vine.

It's a picture that implies provision ~

The vine indicates the gift of self-sustaining, heart-gladdening, wine.

It's a picture that implies satisfaction ~

The fig tree provided a steady supply of fruit that could be dried and served year round. It was a staple in a healthy diet.

Equity, protection, ownership, provision, satisfaction....

It is a rich, rich image of everyone having enough. It does not mean a radical egalitarianism where everybody has an equal amount ~ same size land and same size plant. Rather, it simply suggests that every one has enough.

Imagine that in a world where millions of children die every year for lack of clean water, or mosquito netting, or tetanus shots, or adequate nutrition.

And, then there is this gentle line:

*And no one will make them afraid.*

Now, I don't know how to prove this, I don't know of a Bible-fact-check.com, but John Wibberley, the director of a Sub-Saharan agriculture development team, claims that the Bible offers 366 variations or repeats of the statement "do not be afraid." Enough, "do not be afraid" to cover each day.

What is God's dream for this world?

That everyone will have enough ~ enough space, enough shade, enough wine, and enough food. That creature and creation and Creator will be webbed together in a relationship of mutual fulfillment and delight. That justice and peace will embrace, and there will be no fear.

Early church Father Irenaeus, envisioned that dream of God this way:

*The days will come in which vines will grow, each having ten thousand branches, and each branch ten thousand twigs, and each twig ten thousand shoots, and on each of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretres of wine. And when one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, "I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me."*

It is the dream of God's *shalom*.

Dear friends, can we hope this morning in the dream of God that rises up against every system of domination and oppression that this old world would propagate?

That is to say that the dream of God is not simply a naïve slice of pie in the sky....

That is to say that the dream of God is not simply the saving of souls from some fiery hell and the hope of some fluffy heaven....

That is to say that this ain't the way it's supposed to be...

That is to say that there is an alternative kingdom coming of which the laws and the prophets and Jesus ~ envision, and embrace, and embody, and finally bring into fullness.

But as that is true, I think the hard question is how can we live into, seek after, and be informed by God's dream? If that dream is what God wants and what God will finally do.... How can we find a natural groove in that coming dream? As a middle-class-middle-sized congregation in middle America, with a middle aged pastor.... How can we envision, embody, and embrace that dream?

Let me offer this morning that worship and communion are  
a sign,  
or a seal,  
or a symbol,  
or a participation in that alternative story.

It may not seem like much, but one way that we envision, embody, and embrace the dream of God is worship and communion. Mark Labberton in "The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice" puts it this way:

*Worship names what matters most: the way human beings are created to reflect God's glory by embodying God's character in lives that seek righteousness and do justice. Such comprehensive worship redefines all we call ordinary. Worship turns out to be the dangerous act of waking up to God and to the purposes of God in the world, and then living lives that show it.*

So, dear friends come to table with thanksgiving.  
Come to the table where there is enough for everyone.  
Come to the table in the deep hope that God will take us and wake us and turn us toward the world to live into the coming dream of God.

Amen.