

Shiloh United Methodist Church

This Is Us - Sharing

Adapted from Rev. Tyler Amundson November 25, 2018
Genesis 41 and Matthew 2

Every night when my daughter goes to bed she says a prayer. She is at the age that she started to get nightmares, and they weren't helpful to her. In an effort to drive them away she came up with her own prayer that she says every night with us before she goes to sleep.

Every night she says dad, can we say my dream catcher prayer, and in turn every night I say, "Yes!" Taking a chance to share in the dream.

Her prayer goes this way:

"Dear God,
Help me be brave and safe,
Please, Please, Please,
Get all of the bad dreams out of my head before I fall asleep,
Please, Please, Please,
Get all of the good dreams in my head before I fall asleep,
Amen"

I know why my daughter says this prayer each night, dreams are a powerful part of our life. Day dreams, visions, connections with God or dreaming at night are part of the way we understand who we are, what to fear, and what we hope for. It is those dream moments that inspire us to step out in faith, and to say yes to God.

Stepping out in faith can be risky and sharing can take you places you did not expect, and Joseph found that out in the scripture for today.

Our reading from the Hebrew scriptures is about Joseph's story. Joseph is the favored one in his family, even over his older brothers, and even receives favor from God in a dream. As a young boy he is foolish and shares this dream with his already jealous brothers about how someday he will rule over them, and they beat him and throw him in a pit. Not an encouraging story for sharing what God shares with us in our dreams, not encouraging to us wanting to say, "Yes." One brother then takes pity and makes sure Joseph doesn't die, but is sold off into slavery.

Joseph then gets cursed even more when he remains righteous despite his master's mistress and her attempts to seduce him. In prison, after being falsely accused, he begins to interpret the dreams that God sends to his fellow inmates. Surprisingly resilient Joseph says, "Yes," to sharing his God given talent to support for his fellow inmates as they understand their future. Then Joseph is almost forgotten when Pharaoh has a dream, one of the former inmates remembers Joseph and we arrive at our portion of the story.

I share Joseph's early years, because our second story is about wise magi. Wise ones from the east, that seem to have their acts together. However, God does not generally use people who have their acts together and so Joseph is a good reminder. That even those who are discarded by the world, ignored by the powerful, or doubted by their peers can be the ones who bring salvation by sharing with the world.

Joseph is then called before Pharaoh to interpret a dream. A dream Pharaoh has multiple times with different, symbols hearty grain and poor grain, hearty cows and sickly cows. Joseph is brought before Pharaoh and explains the dreams are about 7 years of hearty crops and 7 years of famine. That for seven years the people Egypt would

experience plenty and they should store during those years, so that when the famine swept the land there would be enough for all.

Before Joseph shares his interpretation of the dream with pharaoh I imagine he pauses. Joseph probably feared interpreting Pharaoh's dream. At 38 years of age, he still remembers when he interpreted his dream to older and more powerful people, people he loved, resulting in him nearly being beaten to death, and the only other time he has shared his gift successfully was with his equals in a prison cell. Here is a powerful king, and Joseph I am sure had to think carefully before sharing, weighing the risks against a safe prison cell. That prison cell was not perfect, but he wouldn't be beaten to within an inch of his life either.

Joseph chooses to step out of his cell and share his gift of interpretation with Pharaoh. He says, "Yes."

What does Pharaoh do after this? He makes Joseph his vizier, the overseer of the land. Joseph the selfish, ignorant, cast off, falsely imprisoned middle aged man, suddenly is placed in a position to help a country that falsely imprisoned him and not only that during the famine, he helps the family that beat and cast him aside. Joseph becomes the salvation of God's people by sharing a gift with outsiders, that was not accepted by his own brothers. Joseph by sharing would go on to save Egypt and his own people of Israel.

From the gospel today, we have the magi travelling with a star in their eye. We always imagine them as some pretty well off intelligent men who really trust the star and their dreams. However, the challenge with our traditional perception is Matthew's gospel always tries to dispel the notion that the powerful have any good ideas, in Jesus' teachings and in the story of Jesus' own death the powerful always get it wrong. One of my favorite authors, Barbara Brown Taylor portrays the

three Wise Men as spiritual gurus who have tried living of herbs for a year, walking on coals, and learning ancient languages who have come to their wits end on how to find meaning and maintaining a relationship with God in their lives.¹

They follow this star in the sky, blindly as if it is all they can see with gifts fit for the king this star must be leading them to. The magi are hoping this star will solve all of their problems and the gifts will invite this king to offer them great insight. They stop by the first place that looks royal and inside is King Herod, who doesn't take them too seriously when his own clergy quote Micah to him about where this king is to be born,

“As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
though you are the least significant of Judah’s forces,
one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out
from you.

His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.”

Not worried, but also anxious of any uprising he sends the wise men to do his work, after sharing with them, “If you find this king come tell me, do my work for me because it is what wise royalty do to respect the customs of other kingdoms.”

The wise ones travel on with their royal gifts, startled to find the star over a simple home in Bethlehem. Inside they find a couple working to understand how to be parents, and realize their gifts are not what maybe was needed. Blankets, warm milk, and shiny things over the crib would have been better. However, they also suddenly receive something after they share their gifts. The gospel describes it as joy, the Greek word Chara means inner joy, deep joy. I wonder greatly if

¹ Taylor, B. B. (2018). *Home By Another Way*. Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books.

this is not marveling at the simple reality of a child, that drew them away from all the important things they thought would get them closer to God.

The God shares a dream with them, and they let go of all the customs and return home by a way they have never traveled before, another road. Sharing for the Magi was sharing the wrong gifts, and in return receiving deep joy. The deep sharing they did, was listening to a dream from God to save this joy, by returning on another road, letting go of the correct customs of respecting power in search of God.

The wise men say “Yes” a lot to God, maybe too often to the little inklings of God they have, but the important thing is, the time that it mattered most, they said their biggest “Yes!” to following a new road home.

The other night my daughter and I found ourselves out shopping, see she had won some money and really wanted to go buy herself a toy. It had been so fun to watch her be responsible with her money, to figure out what she could afford in a store of so many things she wanted. At our first store I was so proud of her as she walked up to the checkout and handed her own hard earned money over, to buy a toy she chose. After that first stop, she had a little left over she wanted to spend. We ended up at the local dollar store. After wandering the cluttered aisles we had discovered the last treasure she wanted to purchase. I handed her the final dollar she had to spend. We walked up to the only open checkout stand.

In front of us was a man with many, many items. He didn't look like a man of a lot of means and as a black man he stood out in our not incredibly diverse town. We got in line and my daughter stood ready to buy her final item. We waited as the checker scanned 20+ Christmas cards, one at a time, 30+ ornaments one at a time, 10+ food items one

at a time. It kept going, and I was doing my best to wait, it is advent right. We as Christians are supposed to wait.

The mood got tense, as more shopper piled up in this one open lane behind me. Not visibly tense, but impatiently tense. You could almost feel some judgement on the air from the shoppers behind me, judging the checker and the man with equal measure. How dare she take so long scanning items, and why did he have to do his shopping this way. And as I stared at what this man was buying I thought to myself, maybe the vision here is God wants me to pay for this man's stuff. Maybe the tension would be broken by an act of generosity. Something stopped me though, something in my dreaming mind realized this man was proud and that might not work out so well. Besides in some ways it was about making myself feel better in the tension, my sharing would have been not based in generosity, but instead my own comforting.

Something was needed though, I was feeling called to share. Just then the checker picked up her phone next to the stand and said, "I need backup."

The moment I needed, I turned to the man and the checker and said, "Man, she knows how to ask for help." We all burst out laughing. A moment later another checker emerged, and then the man pulled out plenty of money to cover the slowly scanned items. We joked a few more times and felt a sense of joyous connection. As we left the store the man and I wished each other a good evening, and he turned to me and said, "Merry Christmas."

The road we have never traveled, the one we don't plan for, the time of sharing or the time we say our real "Yes!" to God can be the birth of Christ in the world that is needed. Our "Yes!" is for not just our salvation, but can in turn help transform the world through God's grace.

Sharing.....of ourselves....is sometimes offering the best we have and finding the best we have is not the right thing. We offer royal gifts, to find God needed us to offer baby gifts. We offer dreams to our family to discover God needed us to offer dreams to the world. We try to offer money to a stranger, to find a laugh was all that was needed to ignite the spark of Christmas.

God will take our imperfect sharing and transform it into what is needed. We have to take the risk of sharing in age that tells us to fear the stranger or that which is different than us. We have to take the Jesus prayer seriously to help us remove those shared sins that keep us from sharing with each other, and we should pray each day for God to help us say, "Yes!" to the good dreams God has for us.

Friends, go this week and say "Yes!" to Christmas, to the small swaddled love placed into the world, and "Yes!" to God's good dream found in the prophet Isaiah and paraphrased by John the Baptist in the gospel of Luke:

A voice crying out in the wilderness:

*"Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.*

*⁵Every valley will be filled,
and every mountain and hill will be leveled.*

*The crooked will be made straight
and the rough places made smooth.*

⁶All humanity will see God's salvation."