

“Everything Is Holy: Our Dreams”
Matthew 27:11-23

A couple of weeks ago, I read about Prince Harry’s self-disclosure in his therapy sessions using EMDR to find wholeness. Normally, I don’t get into the Royal Family drama, but this caught my attention as I myself have gone through that type of therapy. EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. It is based on the idea that mimicking the rapid eye movement we get during deep sleep can help us process tough events from our past. Prince Harry suffered deep pain with his mother’s tragic death and found healing through this therapy method which he wanted to share with others so that they may find wholeness and healing.

Sleep is so essential for our health, especially getting to that deep Rapid Eye Movement stage of sleep. On average REM sleep is when we tend to dream. I think of it as God’s gift for us for renewal, healing, and rest. Yet, it is reported that about 60 million Americans struggle with sleep and end up needing medical help to fall and stay asleep. Our minds are often so active and anxious that it is hard for us to let go and to fall asleep. Our active minds are often referred to as “monkey minds” because they are hyper and keep hopping from one place to the other. Everything seems ten times worse than it really is at 2 am, whether you are dwelling on the past or dreading the future.

There are many strategies, supplements, apps, and music to help us get better sleep. Our dreams could also be part of the solution. Learning to pay attention to our dreams and to use them as a spiritual tool can be one of the most powerful ways God speaks to us to bring us healing and wholeness. The Bible has many stories of incredible transformation based on dreams such as the stories of Jacob and Joseph.

Dreams are a gift and a challenge for us. Many people report that they don’t remember their dreams. Even when we remember them, they are not easy to understand or believe. Dreams rely on symbolism, stories, and feelings; all the things that are hard to quantify and control. They require deep listening and trust in God’s mysterious presence and guidance.

The Gospel of Matthew shares several important dreams relating to the life of Jesus. God spoke through dreams to different people to protect the innocent life of Jesus. We have the dream of the wisemen who listened and did not return to Herod to tell him about the babe they found in Bethlehem. Then there is the dream of Joseph which prompts Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt to spare the life of baby Jesus after Herod had ordered the killing of the Hebrew boys. And in today’s story, we find another dream message for someone who could have chosen to protect an innocent life by releasing Jesus.

In Matthew 26 and 27, we have a very dramatic scene of great fear. Jesus was arrested, left alone, denied by Peter, and beaten by the men of the High Priest. Then Jesus was set to stand before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate had the power to execute or release Jesus. Pilate was a politician. He believed that he had to do what was good for his government and for his image of power. Releasing Jesus would have been seen as a

sign of weakness since Jesus was being presented as a challenge to the rule of law. Pilate's wife got a warning in a dream, just like the wisemen and Joseph did. She tried to stop Pilate from committing the evil he had justified in his mind.

You can see the tension building up. There was the crowd and religious authorities demanding the execution of Jesus. There was also the political pressure to ensure that any rebellion against Rome was squelched as swiftly as possible. At the same time, there was the voice of the Spirit coming to Pilate through his wife's dream. This was a time when people listened more closely to their dreams. In fact, the Romans believed that dreams were important enough to be recorded in their history. They believed that dreams were communications from the gods and expressions of their cultural imagination. According to the culture of that time, it would have been deemed wise for Pilate to listen to his wife's dream. Yet, Pilate chose personal power over divine guidance. Unlike the wisemen who listened to their dream, Pilate defied God's wisdom and guidance for the sake of maintaining his own power. Sometimes we think of Pilate as a minor character in the drama of the crucifixion of Jesus as we tend to focus on the corruption of the Jewish religious leaders, but the fact of the matter is that Jesus was crucified by order of Pilate.

Following our dreams may not have the same weight as the dream of Pilate's wife in terms of consequences, but ignoring our dreams denies us the ability to have direct access to God's wisdom. I once heard this saying, "A dream uninterpreted is an unopened letter from God." This is a powerful reminder of how our dreams can become a doorway to the holy. The Hebrew word for dream is *harlam* which comes from a word meaning "to make whole or healthy." Dreams are one of the ways God communicates with us for our own wellbeing and for the wholeness of the world. Dreams are powerful tools because they bypass the obstacles of our egos such as fear, control, and esteem. But just like all things spiritual, we have to learn to listen to them in symbolic ways and to pay attention to the patterns that emerge from them.

Here are a couple of examples. The first one is from my own experience. Over the past year, one of the recurring dreams I have had with different variations of settings and times, was about being in a crowded place where I forgot to wear my mask. At first, I laughed at myself for having such dreams. But after a while, I knew that I had to listen. What I had to do was to pay attention to the anxiety that was rising in me in these dreams. I didn't get stuck on figuring out all the details. What mattered was the general pattern and feeling associated with the dreams. I finally listened and brought that anxiety before God in prayer. I had to become intentional at the start of each day to release whatever fear and anxiety came over me from the pandemic. The dream also helped me connect with the anxiety and pain of our whole world. It became a part of my prayers of intercession.

In her book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Sue Monk Kidd writes of her journey from patriarchal Christianity into the joy of affirming the gifts of women. Interestingly enough, it was a dream that helped awaken and inspires her to embrace and celebrate the feminine in herself. She grew up in the South in a fundamentalist-type Christian home where her gifts for writing were not affirmed. She conformed to the expectations of others for her by going to nursing school because writing was not seen as an appropriate

profession for women. Yet, in a dream, a wise old woman told Kidd: “Your heart is a seed. Go, plant it in the world.” Kidd had another dream where she saw herself on an island giving birth all by herself. She writes about it this way, “You know how some dreams are so vivid you have to spend a few moments after you wake assuring yourself it didn’t really happen? That’s how I felt... I felt awed, like something of import and worthy of great reverence had taken place...One of the purest sources of knowledge about our lives comes from the symbols and images deep within.”

This week when I pondered why it was so important for us to pay attention to the voice of God in our dreams, the answer came to me in a news article about a little Syrian girl by the name of Nahla Al-Othman who recently died in a refugee camp due to abuse and neglect. You may read the full story here: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210507-syria-child-starved-to-death-after-chained-and-locked-in-cage-by-father/>. We live in a world where such atrocities take place each day which makes our spiritual work even more urgent. The transformation and healing of our world depend on people listening to the wisdom of divine love in their hearts and lives. Just like listening to the dream of Pilate’s wife would have prevented the evil and violence of the cross, listening to God’s voice in our dreams is so essential for our own transformation. One of the gifts of our generous God is that we all dream. If the dream of Pilate’s wife connects with you today, take time to record your dreams. Tell yourself before you go to sleep that you will remember your dreams and see what happens. Don’t let your dreams be unopened letters from God. The healing of the world depends on it. Amen.

We are going to prepare for communion with a guided meditation invitation from Jesus to commune with him. Please sit up straight. Take a few deep breaths. Picture yourself walking thru the woods on a narrow but a fine trail. Tall, tall trees are above you. Green ferns are on both sides of the trail. You come to a clearing. It’s beautiful, wildflowers everywhere. Warm glow about it. The whole area has a special feel to it, and you soon see why. Jesus is there. He is seated on a log in the clearing. About a dozen children are with him. Some are seated on the log with him. Others are on the ground listening to him. One child is seated next to him and Jesus is hugging this child, and the child is hugging Jesus. It’s an amazingly tender sight. And suddenly the child leans back and turns around, and it’s you. You are the child in the arms of Christ. You are a child of God, deeply loved, closely held and cherished, bathed in the sunlight of God’s love. Let Christ guide you to his table of love where he breaks for you the bread of compassion and offers you the cup of his deep joy. Pray...Amen.