

“Some would describe this as the most anxious of times. The structures that shape the society are starting to break apart or radically be changed. Institutions that we took for granted are disappearing or reforming themselves. Even basic social relationships like marriage that we have depended upon as the foundation of society are being redefined.

There are basic assumptions like what it means to be a citizen of the country being challenged. The rapid rise of technological advancement is leading to unimaginable sources of information. This technology is undermining official sources of reliable knowledge.

And then there are the reports of rising violence around the globe. Militant Islamic forces are seen as a threat to Western culture and radical forces within the Western culture pose a threat to stability. The seeking of common ground is debated as the society separates into opposing political, religious, and ideological camps. Yes, I have just described a time of overwhelming anxiety.”

You may have thought that what I just described is the United States in 2010. Actually, what I just described was the situation in Europe in the years leading up to the Protestant Reformation. The time about 500 years ago which led to the birth of the Presbyterian Church and other churches who rebelled against the abuses in the organized church. A time which led to the foundational principles which were used to create the United States of America. A time when people began to dream amazing possibilities.

Some say that every 500 years or so the world undergoes these times of great emergence. Times when societies change rapidly and never before imagined possibilities emerge. 500 years ago was the Protestant Reformation, 500 years before that was the Great Schism which led to the breakup of the Christian Church forming the Eastern Orthodox Church and what we know as the Roman Catholic Church here in the West.

500 years before that was the time of church councils that defined Christianity including the organizing of 66 books that we call our Bible and close to 500 years before that was the time that some guy named Jesus roamed the earth. Some say that we are currently in one of these times of rapid change that seems to occur every 500 years or so.

So if we are in one of those times of rapid change within the Christian Church, then what is needed for us to figure out what God is creating? To help us I am going to invite us into the story of Joseph. Today we are actually being invited into several weeks of exploring the life of Joseph.

We have already been introduced to Joseph during the children's time this morning. Over the next several weeks the kids in the elementary and youth classes will be getting to know Joseph a lot and how his story connects to their story.

Read Genesis 37 referring to following in reading:

vs. 3

Joseph is 17.

Jacob's name is Israel

When a parent favors one child over another, what will this do to family dynamics? It will create jealousy, of course.

Vs. 8

So not only is Joseph the favorite child of his father, he then tells them a dream in which they will all bow to him. It's not hard to figure out that this is the brother they begin to despise more and more.

When we planned to read this passage from Genesis about a dreamer, we did not realize that this would also be the 47th anniversary of a famous speech about a dream. A speech given on the steps of the Washington Monument where Martin Luther King dreamed of a time when everyone, regardless of the color of their skin or economic status would be provided the same opportunities. Rich or poor, black or white, male or female. So it is very appropriate today to read this story about another dreamer.

When King shared his dream, the environment around him testified to something quite different. In his words, a group of people were “sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.” This group was living “on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.”

But instead of accepting the conditions around him, King saw a nation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. A dream that one day the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

Dream’s are unsettling things. Last week, young Heidi Hopf told me about a scary dream that Babar had and how she also once had that same scary dream.

Dreams become scary because we cannot control dreams. That lack of control over dreams is very evident in the passage we read today.

When Joseph shares this dream with his brothers and their father, they become furious and try everything they can in their power to control the dream. But unknowingly their very actions to destroy the dream leads to its completion. The dream which they initially see as a threat to them eventually is fulfilled and saves them.

I just finished a biography on Frank Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was a scientist who helped develop the atomic bomb that was dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan that led to the end of World War II. After helping to develop this weapon, Frank became concerned by the consequences of weapons of mass destruction and began to speak out against its use.

Oppenheimer was labeled a communist and appeared before the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee in 1949 in what came to be known as the era of McCarthyism. He was forced out of his job in the University of Minnesota Physics Department and could not find other work because he was labeled a communist by the FBI.

But even though he had no money, no job, and nothing that seemed possible, Oppenheimer continued to believe in possibilities that did not make sense. Eventually Oppenheimer became a science teacher in Colorado working in one of the poorest districts in the country. Oppenheimer used his skills to inspire these students to learn science in order to understand the world.

While teaching in that depressed place, Oppenheimer caught sight of a dream to create a new kind of museum. A museum which would be hands on. A museum which would inspire the imagination. This museum which he called the Exploratorium became the inspiration for future museums like Discovery Place.

Today when so many people are anxious about this thing or that, we need more dreamers. Dreamers who see possibilities and dreamers willing to fill in the details. Dreamers who are not naïve but willing to seek sound advice and be willing to make adjustments. Dreamers who not only work hard but also work smart.

Dreamers who see the world around them and say to themselves, “this is not God’s intention. God expects so much more.” We then need these dreamers to be willing to partner with God to create that which does not exist.” Dreamers who see injustice and work to right the wrongs.

What excites me about living within this faith community here at Allison Creek is that I get to be around so many dreamers. Just look around what is happening through you. This is a place where dreams are explored.

Where dreams are explored related to how we worship. Or dreams are explored in the way we learn and teach kids, youth and adults. Or dreams are explored concerning how to use and expand this facility. Or dreams are explored concerning new possibilities concerning how and where we carry out mission.

I get to hear your dreams as husbands and wives. I get to hear your dreams as parents and children. I get to hear your dreams as students and employers and employees.

In a world of anxiety, our world needs dreamers. We should all thank God that a place like Allison Creek exists which encourages and supports dreams and possibilities.

Dreaming possibilities does not always mean that those dreams will one day become true.

But dreaming possibilities does mean that we live life with hope for what God is doing today and tomorrow. AMEN.

-Opening info from Jenkins, Michael, "Adventurous Leadership in an Age of High Anxiety," The Presbyterian Outlook, Aug 23, 2010

-Cole, KC, Something Incredible Wonderful Happens: Frank Oppenheimer and the World He Made Up, Houghton Mifflin, Orlando, FL, 2009

-Tickle, Phyllis, The Great Emergence: How the World is Changing and Why, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008

-Text: Genesis 37

-Given: August 29, 2010 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)