

New Year's Dreams

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United Methodist Church of Westport and Weston

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Epiphany Sunday

Isaiah 60:1-6
Matthew 2:1-12

One-third of our lives is spent without any idea what we are doing. Admittedly, many of us spend even greater percentages of our lifetimes clueless. But officially we all have one-third of our lives basically that is unaccounted for.

Why? Because we are sleeping. Sleep is required by every creature with even the most rudimentary brain stem. And though the research into sleep is still in its infancy, we do know that sleep renews our bodies and minds. Without it we cannot survive.

One of the reasons we need to sleep is that we need to dream. Long before electroencephalograms told us about our sleep cycles and psychologists explained that dreams are the products of our unconscious that is hard at work while our body rests, human beings have known that dreams were important. They tell us much about who we are and what is on our minds---even though we may not have been aware of it. And some also believe that dreams, on occasion, are messages from God.

Matthew certainly held to the divine origin of at least some dreams. Three times in his story of Jesus' birth, dreams play an important role. Do you remember them?

When Joseph finds out that his betrothed, Mary, is expecting a child, he plans to "put her aside quietly," as Matthew reports, until an angel appears to him in a dream and tells him that Mary in fact has not been unfaithful to him and that the child she is to bear will be God's own son. Joseph chooses to believe that dream and takes Mary as his wife, and God's plan unfolds through them.

Later, when Herod unleashes his diabolical plan to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem, another angel appears to Joseph, warning him of the danger and instructing him to take his family to Egypt until it was safe to return. Could it be only coincidence that Jesus' earthly father is the namesake of another Joseph of centuries before who, through his skill at interpreting dreams, was able to give the Jewish people a new beginning in the land of Egypt, until they could one day be led into the Promised Land?

Then we have today's story about the wise men who, after finding the newborn king they sought---not in Herod's court but in an animal stall---return home by a different route than which they had come. Why? Because they had been warned in a dream not to return to that deceitful Herod.

Are dreams only the stuff of our subconscious, or can they be communications from another place? Can God ever speak to us in that one-third of our lives when we have no idea what we're doing?

I don't see why not. I understand that dreams are almost always a hidden part of our minds speaking to us. Effective dream interpretation can be wonderfully revealing.

On the other hand, God chooses all manner of ways to attempt to communicate with us. Why not through our unconscious? Maybe that's the only time our defenses are lowered enough for God to get through.

There are many types of dreams, of course. Not the ones that come to us when we're asleep, but when we're fully awake. Dreams that lift our eyes above the dim light of our everyday existence to a broader view, visions of a future that excite and inspire us to take on big new challenges and travel interesting new roads.

Dreams like those of the magi, who kept their eyes on the stars and their feet ready to hit the ground when the star of all stars appeared.

We used to talk about BHAG – Big Hairy Audacious Goals. A B-HAG, as described in the book, *Built to Last*, by James Collins and Jerry Poras, is a bold, seemingly unattainable vision. Common sense would tell you that a BHAG is too large and intimidating to try. But, in a paradoxical way, according to Collins and Poras, the idea of attempting the impossible is so exciting and energizing that organizations usually experience an upsurge of motivation when leaders presents a BHAG to their people. John F. Kennedy's speech in 1961 of landing a man on the moon by the end of the decade was a perfect example of a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal.

BHAG's are really BHAD's---Big Hairy Audacious Dreams. God created us to dream, to aspire, to strive for the best we can be, to follow our own particular star. That is how we, and the world, advance. And sometimes that takes enlarged thinking, looking for signs beyond our normal landscape to the one God is laying before us.

The wise men followed their dream of finding the infant child, but it wasn't a straight-line trip. Convinced that he had to be from a certain place and background, they found themselves in dangerous company. Finally God led them to the desire of their hearts, but then took them home another way than they'd come---both geographically and spiritually. They were among the first to learn that you're just never quite the same after an encounter with Jesus.

Entering into a new year is always a good time to check in on our dreams. What excites us about our future? What big thing can we involve ourselves in that would send us home a bigger person, enriched and somehow changed?

If you don't have a good sense about that at this time, maybe it's time to open your spiritual eyes and look for guidance. Take some time to reflect, to pray, to ask what big thing God may have in mind for you. Sure, it's great to make resolutions about taking better care of yourself and those you love. But how many times have you resolved to get more rest, lose weight and exercise more? Those are all worthy goals, but what about your dream? Your Big Hairy Audacious Dream?

Think about it: In 100 years, who will be leading your company? Who will be doing your job? Who will be living in your house? These things are all fleeting and fade with time. What about something more, something greater than yourself? What about being part of God's dream for the world, something that will outlive you and make a real difference in the world?

Wouldn't it be great to be part of God's plan to hold together this lost and lonely planet? Wouldn't it be marvelous to know that, because of you, hungry people are fed, little children have a chance at a better life, people living in desperate situations will be given hope?

True, we are all just travelers on the road to find the king, not the king himself. We cannot save the world ourselves. But we all can be dreamers and doers who give our hearts to God's Big, Audacious Dream of peace and justice and joy for all people.

There are so many dreams that are only false hopes, vague wishes, deceptive illusions. Like clever advertising, they do not give us the payoff they promise. But God's dream will give us more than we ever could have imagined. As one woman said who gave up a successful career in business to work in a community organization, "My comfortable lifestyle actually insulated me from really knowing and experiencing God. Now I know about His goodness because I've experienced God's blessings firsthand."

Not everyone is called to follow the same path, of course. There are many blessings to be found wherever our star leads us. But the important part is that we keep searching for our star, keep dreaming our dream, keep dreaming God's dream for us. It's a journey that may take a lifetime, but it will be one that we will never regret taking.