

Micah 5: 2-5a “Dreams of an Amputee & Foster Kid” Rev. Janet Chapman 12/12/21

This has been a year of dreams coming true, some good, some not so good. Those who have dreamed of traveling to space saw space tourism become a reality thanks to Virgin Atlantic & Blue Origin – something many of us never dreamed we would live to see. Those who dreamed of COVID coming to an end in 2021 instead saw the emergence of the Delta Variant which has proven more dangerous. Rob & Jen experienced the dream of a lifetime in the birth of baby Ezekiel while others felt their worst nightmares coming true in the death of cherished loved ones. The year has been a rollercoaster of ups and downs and we have learned to not predict the next turn, thrill or downslide but just hold on to each other for dear life through it all.

But what if you don't have someone to hold onto? Just about 20 years ago, my then husband and I were trying to have a 2nd child, but it just wasn't possible. We explored adoption but then fell into foster parenting and it was one of the best decision we ever made. Starting in Kansas City and then onto Fresno, we connected with at least 6 kids, 4 of whom we had for a couple years, and one we adopted as some of you know. Ivy came to us at the age of 11 via her schoolteacher who was a member at the Selma church. The teacher knew we were foster parents and that her student Ivy was not in a good foster situation at the time. They repeatedly left Ivy, with her many medical conditions, to fend for herself and the day that Ivy's leg amputation was scheduled, they decided to take a cruise and leave her alone at Shriners to deal with the trauma. That was the move that finally got the county's attention, so we were invited to bring Ivy and her 16 y.o. sister into our home. By the time she came to us, she had had more surgeries than years she had lived on this earth. Her sister, starting at the age of 8 or 9, was the

one to change her IV or bandages because from birth, Ivy battled issues with heart, lungs, spinal, and physical development of extremities. Their mother was doped up on the current drug of choice and would lock her door in order not to be bothered. Up until now, Ivy has wanted to be very private about her background and her dreams for the future and I have respected that. Growing up a foster kid is very hard as their dreams for stability and family get crushed over and over. The pain is deeply real and sometimes embarrassing, as many just want to have that one person they can trust to be there no matter what. But recently she shared with me, "Mom, I think I'm ok with people hearing my story if it will help them not to give up, if it will remind them that God knows our dreams and if those dreams are good for us, God helps them come true."

Dreams have been central means through which God has spoken over the centuries as seen in both Mary & Joseph as well as predecessors Jacob; Laban; Joseph, the son of Jacob; Daniel, and many prophets like Micah. I doubt Ivy studied much about Micah in catechism, which she attended at the insistence of her beloved but fragile Catholic grandparents, or in her later years in the Selma youth group or church camp, but the words, "God knows our dreams and if they are good for us, God helps them come true" could easily have been from Micah's legacy. We know little about Micah except the town from which he came, and the era in which he prophesied. His world of 2700 years ago was a rollercoaster of ups and downs not unlike our own and he dreamed of a better day. A minor prophet himself compared to his contemporary Isaiah, he held to a dream for the small and insignificant ones to finally see justice and equity. Micah spoke of a world turned upside down where the unpretentious, the downtrodden such as the foster child and the neglected, the poor and the abused, would find

their dreams coming true. He lifts up Judah, the tiniest of tribes, as bringing forth the mightiest of leaders. Rather than focusing on Jerusalem, the great capital, the center of worship, ritual and influence, he honors the modest village of Bethlehem which means “house of bread.” The town’s past will become Israel’s future hope. Our text is a promise that even in bad circumstances, great things shall come from small things. A little town becomes the focus of the world’s last best hope and dream. In a little town of Bethlehem, we witness God’s power which isn’t displayed in moving mountains, outmaneuvering nature, or performing tricks. God’s power is revealed in God’s ability to make much out of little, because that is what God does in creation, what is done at Christmas, and what is done with us, if only we will allow it.

Ivy was always the smallest in her class; she compensated by being the class clown, cracking jokes and being fun to be around. Bent over by her spinal condition, she couldn’t stand up straight which only made things worse. At the age of 10, Dr. Lerman, peds orthopedist at Shriners, gave her the choice to have her leg amputated. If she did, maybe one day she would be able to stand up straight, walk steadily, even run, something she never had done before. If not, she assuredly would grow more bent over, but she could keep her leg. There was no family, no foster parents present to help her decide. The approval would be given by Child Protective Services depending upon her choice. “What 10 year old can make such a life-changing decision all by herself?” I once asked Ivy. She said, “I had a dream, Mom, way before I knew any of this was a possibility, when I was much younger, that one day the leg would be removed from my body. I saw the separated leg inside a plastic bag floating in the air and it didn’t scare me. The leg had pretty purple stars marked on it and a calming voice spoke to me saying, ‘It will be alright; everything will be ok.’ Although I consciously didn’t remember the

dream at the time, I believe it was what gave me the courage to say yes to the surgery. It wasn't until afterwards that I remembered the dream, and the realization that on the day of the surgery I was told to color whatever I wanted on the leg. Without thinking, I ended up putting purple stars in the exact same spots which the dream had revealed. I look back and I know that the dream came from God, because I was too young to understand that such a thing could happen, let alone what significance marking the leg prior to surgery would have had." For Ivy, it was the beginning of dreams being realized with God's grace, of being given something worthy to hold onto... like a forever family, like running, wearing heels, even first love... and too many boyfriends for me to keep track of. As for me, I too am grateful to have another someone in my life to hold onto, and her story is proof that great things shall come from small things because that is what God does.

And just a reminder as we draw to the end of this rollercoaster year that Christmas is far more than a sentiment, an idea, or even some joyful feeling about God. Christmas belongs to those who recognize not the joy of the holidays, but the real joyful presence of God on the ride of their lives, not simply long ago and far away, but here and now. The world of little Bethlehem was real, Caesar Augustus was real, Herod was real, taxation was real, death and despair were real and deemed normal, and in the midst of all this, then as in now, God has to be made real for you and for I, as the dreams of all the years are met in thee this day.