

I don't want you to think I'm crazy, but I preach a lot while I'm asleep.

Yes, this happens more when I'm preparing a sermon for Sunday, but sometimes it just comes out of the blue. What happens is I'll be preaching away, passionate and articulate and thoughtful ... and speaking really slowly, of course ... and in my dream I'll think, this is really good stuff! It's as if the words are coming straight from God. Of course, I'll want to remember what I'm saying, so I'll repeat the same paragraph two or three times, to imprint it on my brain so I can write it down when I'm conscious.

But when I wake up, the same thing always happens: I try and get it out of my head, but it's a mess. I manage to muddle up a perfectly articulate dream sermon every time. And I'm always a little frustrated at God for not giving me this great inspiration when I'm awake and can actually do something with it. It's like, what's the point of having God speak to me if I can't remember what God's saying?

So do you believe God speaks in dreams? A man named Ron from my former congregation did. A few years back he was fishing at a remote lake in Canada. In the middle of the night, as clear as a bell, Ron heard a deep voice say, “Your Aunt Mary died.” The next morning he was so disturbed that instead of going fishing, he drove down the mountain into town so he could call home to check on things. Sure enough, it was true. And even though Mary's death made Ron sad, his dream brought him comfort because it made him believe more strongly in God's presence and promises.

I've always been envious of people who hear God's voice clearly in their dreams ... and not only that they are able to hear God's voice, but that they know it was God and that they're brave enough to listen to what God has to say.

Joseph was like that. I don't know what it was about his dreams that made them so clear, made him so confident in who was speaking to him, that somehow he knew and was bold enough to act. Maybe it's because in those times, it wasn't unusual that God's will was revealed through dreams. And God was certainly busy in the night when it came to the circumstances of the birth of Jesus. Joseph hears in a dream that he's supposed to marry his pregnant fiancée. The wise men hear in a dream that they're supposed to avoid going back to Herod. Joseph is warned in a dream that Jesus' life is in danger. In a dream, God gives their little family directions to escape to Egypt, the news that the coast is clear, and guidance of where they should go when they return. It's as if God wants to make sure his plans turn out exactly right.

So, do you believe God speaks in dreams? It's not necessarily a simple yes-or-no question. If you're like me, you want to believe – but you're not positive. How do you know those crazy ideas you get in the middle of the night are from God? And what are you going to do about them? Are you brave enough to listen?

Not long ago a friend of mine was in a pickle. He got this incredible job offer, a very prestigious position at the top of his field. There was just one problem: He's from New York, and nothing against you North Dakota types, but the job was in Fargo. His family really doesn't want to move. Every time he thought his mind was made up, he'd hear something else that changed it. At one point, he turned on the TV, and the game show Jeopardy! was on, and, no lie, the category was "Fargo." Was that a sign from God ... or does he need to spend a little more time dreaming?

One thing to remember is that God's word often doesn't come out of the blue. Even as Joseph was learning God's will through his dreams, Matthew points out that

everything he heard was fulfillment of scripture: that God's son would be called out of Egypt; that humanity suffers terribly at the hands of unjust rulers like Herod; that the Messiah would be associated with a particular part of Israel. In this passage we see that God's plan to save the world through Jesus Christ wasn't an accident. God so loves the world that he will go to any lengths to reach out to us. *In the earliest days, God spoke through the prophets. But in these days, he has spoken to us through a son.*

The great preacher Fred Craddock wrote, "Faith is created in a whisper – because we're not sure if it's believable – it comes in quiet, come in the middle of the night." Sometimes it comes when you feel confused and unsure about the future, like my friend. Sometimes it comes when you feel absolutely certain and sure, like it did for Joseph. God comes creeping into our hearts and minds and says, *hear me. I have plans for you.* And that's when God's will begins to grow in us. Trust grows when we listen for God's voice in the dark, and when we let that voice guide us to the light. Faith grows when we bring our confusion and doubts to God as we pray. Confidence grows when we own our decisions and live the lives we've been given instead of dreaming them away. Love grows when we practice patience, and wait for God to work in us.

My friends, I truly believe that God does speak to us – in dreams, in ideas, in a tug, in the words of a friend. It's part of God's plan to be involved in our lives. So what might God be asking you to do? Is it to help someone in need? To mend a relationship? To spend more time with him in prayer? To pay attention to a child, to be more patient, to move to Fargo? There might be a lot at stake. Joseph could have ignored his dream. Mary could have talked him out of it. A lot of times we do – too many other things we're

listening to, there's not enough time, we're too distracted. But if you listen, really listen, you just might hear a clear word from God at a time you need it most.

And if you happen to wake up in the morning wondering what you're hearing ... ask God to give it to you again. Because God has things to say to you – and God will not stop speaking until he is heard. Amen.