

“Fear”

Sermon, August 13, 2017

Genesis 37:1-4; (12-16) 17-28, Matthew 14:13-21), 22-27 (28-33)

+++++

Scapegoating. East Indian American scholar Dr. Vimala Pillari has written the definitive text on “Scapegoating.” Dr. Pillari first began to develop her theory of Family Scapegoating in her early seminal study: “Pathways to Family Myths.” Her doctoral research in Social Welfare, developed as a student at Columbia University under Dr. Margaret Mead and Dr. Caryl Chessman).

Vimala Pillari, served as dean of United Methodist related Clark Atlanta University’s Whitney M. Young Jr. School of social work for 9 years. She was named the founding dean of the Texas A&M University’s College of Health Sciences and Human Services in the system effective Aug. 1, 2016.

+++++

If you grew up having doubts about your self-esteem or personal worth. If when things went wrong in your family, you tended to be blamed-If you found yourself encountering recurring disrespect from friends or colleagues-If you felt unsure of yourself and/or had difficulty experiencing trust in relationships-If you were drawn to people who repeatedly hurt you, acted

irresponsibly or let you down-you may have been “scapegoated” from childhood. The “Scapegoat” in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 16:1-34) is a person or animal that takes on the sins of others, or is unfairly blamed for problems. The concept originally comes from Leviticus, in which a goat is designated to be cast into the desert with the sins of the community.

The Scapegoat doesn't get picked randomly or by accident. Usually they are either sensitive, vulnerable, ill and/or the outspoken child or the whistle-blower.

Joseph was sensitive, prescient, vulnerable to events and persons around him, outspoken in his convictions and visions, and the family whistleblower. Israel had sent Joseph to see how and what his brothers were doing. The favoritism that Israel conferred on him had the effect of making him the scapegoat of his

brothers. They feared and hated him. They saw him as the source of their trouble. His visions of ruling over them created more fear, which led to hatred. Right now fear is driving our nation, our international relations and even our churches.

Numerous scapegoats have been identified as the source of our fears. Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, Gays, lesbians, bisexual transgender Americans, Muslims and Muslim immigrants, Arab Americans, all immigrants of color from Africa and Asia, professional women, and of course and always, African Americans. Nonwhite, foreign-born, non-Christians are all scapegoated and made objects of fear and hatred, just as Joseph was.

There is an irrational desire to return to some fictitious period in America where we all looked

alike, believed the same and spoke English. Of course that has only ever been true in the minds of those whose privileges as western Europeans with little skin pigmentation seemed secure.

Persons from other parts of the world with more melanin in their skin were excluded and made invisible by law and by social practice.

Jacob sent Joseph, the dreamer, the scapegoat, whom his brothers feared in their direction. They felt that getting rid of Joseph would solve their problems, so they plotted to kill him. God has sent new people, new ideas, new faiths, and new cultural practices very different from the so-called “normal” that we are used to.

The boat that carried the disciples was battered by the waves, they were far from land, the wind was against them. These are the conditions that create fear. Our consciousness is battered by the new and different. We are far removed from

what is familiar and normal. The wind itself, our source of negotiating the storms of life, seems to be pushing against us, moving us differently.

After a full night of experiencing these turbulent conditions, Jesus walked out onto the sea toward the boat. Seeing him they were terrified in the same manner in which Joseph's brothers were terrified by his dreams. After all, who and what walks on water? But the Christ, sensing their terror called out, "Be not afraid, it is I." Do we get it yet? The very thing that we fear, that we are running from and seeking to destroy, is God's future for us. It is God's means of moving us forward. The turbulence, change, and uncertainty surrounding us this very moment is God's calling to us, saying, "Fear not, it is I," your God knocking at the door of possibilities,

for us, seeking to move us forward toward and eternal weight of glory on Christ. [2 Cor. 4:17].

For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

Peter called out, "If it is you, if I have nothing to fear, then give me the ability to walk on water as you are doing." "Step out of the boat, Jesus replied, "and walk." If we would overcome our fear of the storm, of change, of "different," then we will step out of our boats. This is how life is lived. To God who gives miraculous victories over fear, let the church say glory hallelujah and Amen.