

The Dream

It's 6 o'clock in the morning and I am awake. I had not planned to be. In fact, it will be another half hour before my alarm goes off, telling me it's time to prepare for my morning run, and I've had less than 6 hours of sleep. Not for lack of trying mind you. I was in bed by 11pm last night, knowing that today would be a full day, a day for errands in Mt. Hagen, and I would need my sleep. But I couldn't sleep. I didn't know why. Indigestion?... Excitement or anxiety over the events of tomorrow?... Another night fraught with sinus congestion due to allergies? There were any number of plausible explanations, and I knew willing myself to sleep would not make sleep come any faster. So I prayed that God would allow sleep to come at His will, and I waited, for over an hour I waited. Finally sleep did come, and along with it a dream, one that I feel compelled to share.

In this dream, I was with my parents, not surprising since one of my last activities of the day had been to write emails to them. My mother and I were walking together through a house drama, similar in style to "House of Judgment", for those who are familiar with that genre of drama. Each scene of the drama takes place in a different room and the audience travels from room to room, following the actors. I do not now remember all the details of the drama, but I remember being quite impressed. It had followed the life of a young woman and her journey. And then came the punch line. My mother and I were led into a final room, where we were joined by my father, whom I don't remember traveling with us through the drama, but perhaps he was in another room. We all sat down, I in a chair and my parents on a sofa with a wood frame. A man came out with a little slide card, one such that you might slide through the jacket in order to match up the name of a guitar chord with the string alignment or a teacher might use to match up the number of questions with a grade allotment. He was struggling to figure out how to use it. It seemed that each answer we were meant to give coordinated with a next response, and on the wall was a chart where our responses would be marked and assessed. I soon realized what was happening. This man was trying to use this sliding card and chart to speak to us about Jesus, to give us the formula for being "saved." In my dream, I became visibly distressed, and I could tell by the glances from my parents and the way they shifted in their seats that they too were agitated by this experience. In unbelief, I asked the man, "Are you assessing my Christianity with a little card? Are you *really* trying to give me a formula for salvation?" Finally, in desperation and anger, I proclaimed, "Well, am I "*Christian*" enough? What do you think? Have I said all the right things? Have I done all the right things?" The man looked clearly surprised and perplexed by my questions. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders, and looking downward, shaking his head slightly, he admitted, "I don't know." The tension in my countenance lessened as I looked at this man, and I asked sympathetically, with tears bristling in my eyes, "May I offer a suggestion?" He glanced up eagerly, giving me permission to continue. "I loved the drama," I said, "But it was only a drama. What I would have preferred to hear in the end was not a formula or what I must *do* next, but a story, a real story. I want to know about you. What did it mean to you? What does it mean to you?" The man looked suddenly relieved, like a deep burden had been lifted. He said simply, "Thank you," and then added as an afterthought, "Would you be willing to tell this to my superiors?" Enthusiastically, I proclaimed, "I would be willing to tell this to whoever you want me to!!" We walked out of the room, and I caught the eyes of my parents as I left, which

glittered in agreement and support. I then went to the front desk of what seemed to me to be a hotel, and spent much time imploring the man behind the desk to change the ending of the drama. And just for the sake of full disclosure and as proof that this was in fact a dream with all the random absurdities of a dream, I remember my father standing in the corner of the room, completely at peace that I was taking care of the situation, enjoying a piece of chocolate cake, a delicacy I don't eat frequently in Papua New Guinea and sometimes crave. Yes, I implored the man behind the counter with all the passion and emotion that was within me. But he just stood there, smiling a patronizing smile, as if listening to the whims of a small child.

And thus I awoke, tears still pooling in my eyes. I was in my bed, in my little house in Papua New Guinea, fully awake, though the hours of sleep had been few, and urged by an impulse to write. It is now 6:30am and as I sit here in my bed, typing on my laptop, the sun is rising over the mountains. The morning chill has started to numb my fingers, but I could not begin my day without writing this.

For those of you who may be thinking, "Who is this girl? She could not possibly have dreamed something this complex and remembered it all," you have obviously not before experienced the depth and intensity of my dreams. This is not a new phenomenon for me. Many a morning have I requested the ears of my family or the Lutz family and filled them with recitations of my strange night tales, most of which are conjoined thoughts from the previous days' events, gathered together in a mottled mess that may or may not resemble a story and that often merely reflect snippets of my current state of mind. But this dream was different, and thus the reason I risk your puzzlement, skepticism or judgment by putting it in print.

And I leave you with this appeal. Christianity is *not* a formula. It is not something we *do*. It is not a set of rituals, or saying the right prayer, or speaking the magic words, or believing something rightly enough that it might possibly earn you a ticket to heaven. How dare we reduce it to such! How dare we judge others based on our criteria of what is right! No, Christianity is about a relationship, an experience of God reaching to your heart, through no power, strength, or action of your own. If you are going to speak of anything, if you are going to share *anything*, speak of what Christ has done in *your* life. Speak of that moment or that lifetime of moments when you realized that you weren't enough, that you needed the hand of a loving God in your life, and it was *there*. It doesn't have to be a single moment or a visibly life-changing "I was a drug addict and now I'm clean" kind of moment. It just has to be *your* moment, *your* experience. Speak of that. And leave the judgment, formulas, and attempt to do all the "right" things to others. There's enough of that in the world... Sadly.

An epilogue, of sorts...

Since that morning, I have had more time to reflect on that dream and what God has been teaching me recently. I would like to make an addendum to the sentiments expressed on that cold crisp morning. I still believe that speaking one's story—what God has done and is doing in your own life—has vastly more pertinence in the lives of others than judgment, formulas, and attempting to do all the right things. Christians are, after all, merely people...people who don't

get it all right...who continue to hurt others, intentionally or unintentionally...who can do some absolutely horrible things personally and institutionally...and I think it is irresponsible for us to ignore that or pretend it isn't true. We can't pretend that we have our acts together. We can only share that we know we don't, and that's why Christ came. And there is a freedom in that knowledge that goes beyond explanation or formula. That's what we are called to share. I firmly believe that.

However, upon further reflection, I also firmly believe that even more important than telling *your* story is *hearing* the other person's. Really listening. There is a time and a place for our stories and our experiences, but *never* at the expense of the other's. So let's listen with our hearts my friends. Hear the joy. Hear the pain. Show God's love. And the words will follow, as needed.