

Our Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat by Rev. Doug McCusker

In 1939, the Wizard of Oz, introduced color to moviegoers in a very dramatic fashion. It wasn't the first movie presented in color, but its predecessors were mostly colorized or experimental projects that hardly anyone saw. Three-strip technicolor, which requires red, green and blue film to be run through the camera simultaneously, only came out in 1936 and it was a very expensive technique. The Wizard of Oz was a blockbuster film, so no expense was spared. For most of the audience, it was the first time that they had ever seen a color film.

What stunned the audience was the way that color was introduced. The movie opens in black and white set in rural Kansas. The main character, a restless teenager named Dorothy runs away from home with her dog Toto to save him from the mean neighbor who was trying to have him put down.

Unfortunately, a tornado descends on her little town and she gets swept up in the maelstrom. When she lands on the ground, she opens her eyes and everything is in lush, vivid technicolor. The contrast was striking. Rather than shades of gray, the audience saw every color in the rainbow. The introduction of color became part of the story.

Dorothy famously exclaimed: "Oh, Toto, I don't think we are in Kansas anymore." No, she wasn't, at least not in her consciousness. She was having a technicolor dream. She was in the land of Oz; a stranger in a strange land. She could no longer rely on the predictability of her former life. Instead of conformity, the key to her success was the discovery of her unique power; of her identity. Her epic adventure was really an elaborate metaphor for the internal spiritual journey we all must take to find where we belong.

The film makers of the Wizard of Oz used color to expand our field of view so we could see things in a different light. That point of transition from black and white to color still has a powerful effect on me, even with all our special effect wizardry. It hits me with a jolt like when I sense that something major has changed, when my world as I know it transforms. It is scary and exciting at the same time. We could use such a jolt these days.

Constant news of crime and violence, consumer ads telling us we need to buy more stuff, and relentless demands on our time can grind us down to a spiritual numbness and complacency. That kind of negative energy can hold us down and make us feel powerless. We are made to believe that evil and hate are the norm; we can't trust anyone and that the world is a dog eat dog nightmare.

I consider that a black and white perspective. Everything is seen through the lens of competition and scarcity. Differences are treated as divisions with rigid boundaries and sharp edges. Conflict becomes a wrestling match for superiority. Instead of talking we wind up shouting. Violence and war seem inevitable. In this world view, the goal is uniformity by force.

Like Dorothy, we know deep in our psyche that as humans we are much more than that. Despite all our fears, we also possess the ability to dream and imagine a world somewhere over the rainbow in which stereotypes and biases are neutralized by an understanding of our differences. For us to get there, we must not only go on an individual spiritual journey, but we must do this as a human collective.

I'm talking about Beloved Community; a technicolor vision of a world in which we are enriched rather than threatened by our differences. A world in which the many shades and hues of culture, religion, sexuality, physical and mental abilities blend to form a coat of many colors. In this world view, the goal is unity through peaceful understanding.

I realize that many people are colorblind or are unable to see at all. So, using sight and color as an analogy to explain differences does not work for everyone. Ironically, it reinforces the point that we all bring different abilities, gifts and talents to the table of life.

Unity and uniformity are quite different, even though they share the same root word of "uni" – meaning oneness. Uniformity is about eliminating difference and achieving agreement by everything being the same. Unity is about retaining differences and achieving agreement through a collective approach. Uniformity works on a small scale and requires a top-down power to enforce. Unity is effective at larger scales and requires dialog, understanding and mutuality. Anything that is complex like the human body or an ecosystem comes together through unity rather than uniformity.

If you are like me, I go back and forth between the black and white and technicolor worlds. Man-made tragedies like Las Vegas and natural disasters like Puerto Rico bring out both the worst and best of humanity. Good and evil; creativity and destruction co-exist in the universe, and it is up to us to find a balance as we evolve.

In our story this morning, we heard about Joseph, son of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. The story of Joseph is the last patrilineal narrative in the Hebrew book of Genesis. It is a tale of evil and redemption; the worst and the best of humanity. It is a metaphor for transformative spiritual journey, both individual and collective.

Like Dorothy, Joseph is wrenched out of his ordinary life and cast out to a strange land. He is sold into slavery by his own brothers who hated him for being his father's favorite son. An Arab caravan of merchants happened to be traveling through the area and so he was taken to Egypt and sold to the head of Pharaoh's guard. Later, he was thrown into prison. But no matter his misfortune, he always rose to become a leader, respected by his masters and his followers alike.

Dreams play a prominent role in this story. Joseph seemed to be on a spiritual journey from the outset, driven by divine insight and opportunity. Isn't it interesting that those who we call Dreamers here in the United States are people who came here as children from another country and went on to prosper as productive members of society. In every time and place there have been dreamers who find themselves in a foreign land but can still reach deep within themselves to find that sense of belonging and purpose.

Joseph might have been the original Dreamer. He used dreams to improve society and save lives. Through dreams and dream interpretation, he brought his connection with God with him and the Pharaoh accepted it as a different perspective. Imagine that! Joseph, a Hebrew, became the number two leader in all of Egypt.

It would be a serious mistake, a colossal tragedy if our present-day Dreamers were thrown out of this country and denied the chance to share their unique gifts and talents in the land that they now call home.

In the story of Joseph, geography plays a major role. It takes place where three continents come together, Europe, Asia and Africa. Palestine and Egypt are the ancient crossroads of western civilization. Throughout the story, people are traveling back and forth. As famine hit the area, people traded with each other or migrated in order to survive. After Joseph was re-united with his family, they all moved to Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen.

The larger story of humanity is the story of migration, of constant movement across the earth whether by sea, air or land. In some cases, it was for survival, but in others it was for conquest. Some people went freely and in others they were enslaved. This has been going on since before the time of Joseph.

Our current civilization here on the American continent is a testament to that ancient story. People came here thousands of years ago when the Asian and American continents were linked by ice. And then in another major wave, attributed to Columbus and the Europeans, people came in boats across a vast ocean.

Tomorrow is a national holiday commemorating that wave of migration from the point of view of the European travelers not the enslaved Africans or indigenous hosts.

With all the migration in the last 500 years, especially in the last two centuries, we have assembled a multicultural society that some view as a threat while others see it as an opportunity. I guess it depends if you are looking through a black and white or a color filter. Now the roles have flipped. The descendants of the European travelers are the hosts who possess most of the power on this continent. Isn't it interesting that now they want to stop the inexorable migration of people?

Adam and I both have parents from Latin America who trace their European roots to the southern part of the continent along the Mediterranean Sea where people have been mixing and matching, fighting and blending for hundreds of generations.

In the book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, Jared Diamond asked the simple question of why certain civilizations in the history of mankind developed technology faster than others. He wanted to know why the Spanish Conquistador arrived in the Americas with guns and horses while the indigenous people were still living in the bronze age. His answer was geography.

Those people along the vast east-west stretch of Eurasia had the advantage of relatively similar climate zones. This made travel easier and more widespread. Along with the migration of people has been the movement of plants and animals. Humans within this corridor developed stronger immunity to germs and a greater diversity of domesticated animals and plants. Additionally, the constant exchange of ideas led to innovations at a much faster rate than with their counterparts living on continents with a predominantly north-south orientation like Africa and the Americas.

Adam and I were joking that we are both mutts. But, there is no pure anything or anyone at this point in the story of this planet. Our individual gifts and talents are our own, but they have been handed down, nurtured, shaped and refined by all those people who came before us. All those people who have been moving around in search of a place to raise their families and keep the story alive.

We all are the Guatemalan child, the Syrian refugee, the African slave, the Polynesian mariner. Deep within our genes is the map of our travels. We may never have been to China, but someone long ago in our DNA history may have come from there. We are a living, breathing example of unity on a global scale. Our skins, our

bones and our cells are our coats of many colors, stitched together by the thread of humanity. None of us is the same and none of us is inherently superior. Beloved Community is not an imaginary vision of what might be, but a discovery of who we already are. Beloved Community is our spiritual home where we belong. The only way to get back there is to awaken from the illusion of our separateness. To accept one another as both different and connected. To treat each encounter with another person as an experience of wholeness. I don't know that the journey ever ends, it just gets deeper and wider. This is the work of our time. To find our way back home together. There's no place like home, there's no place like home, there's no place like home.