

Sermon for August 6, 2017
Joseph: Beyond the Technicolor Dreamcoat
“Once Upon A Time...”

Genesis 37:1-36

Once upon a time there was a boy named Joseph. Joseph was the apple of his father's eye. That's even more significant when you consider that his father was Israel; yes, that Israel, a.k.a. Jacob. In that day and age the eldest son was favored over the others, but Joseph, the youngest, was favored by Israel probably because of who his mother was.

You can read the sorted detail in Genesis 29-33. In a nutshell, Joseph was the first born of Israel's favorite wife Rachel. Jacob, or Israel, had fallen in love with Rachel, the younger of two sisters. He arranged to marry her, but was tricked into marrying her sister Leah instead. He ended up marrying both. Rachel remained his favorite wife, but she was barren. Her sister Leah, however, had children, so Rachel gave her handmaiden to be a wife to Israel. In retaliation Leah gave her handmaiden to bear Israel children.

In the end Israel ended up with 4 wives, a daughter and 10 sons. Then finally Joseph was born to Rachel. Just as Israel had favored Rachel, he now favored Joseph over his other children. He gave Joseph a coat of many colors with long sleeves. This was the kind of garment royalty, not the headers of livestock, would wear. It was a status symbol. It served as a tangible reminder of Israel's favoritism. Israel was probably also training Joseph to read and manage the family business; to be in charge of the clan. All of this created tension in the family and led Joseph's brothers to hate him.

At the same time that Israel was favoring Joseph, God was blessing Joseph. God gave Joseph the gift of having and interpreting dreams. This gift would play an important part in God's vision for the future. God gave Joseph two dreams. The meaning of the dreams is transparent. The whole family would bow down to Joseph.

Joseph was a gifted and blessed young man. He could have been humbled by this, but instead he was proud. He flaunted his place in the family, and bragged about his dreams. The end result is that his brothers grow to despise him even more.

All of this came to a head in an unthinkable act. Israel sends Joseph to practice his management skills by going to check on his brothers as they graze the flocks. But the brothers see him off at a distance. They plot to put an end to his dreams. At first they plan to kill him, but Ruben, the eldest, in an attempt to rescue him says, “Let's not actually kill him. Just throw him in a pit and leave him there.” Ruben had planned to rescue him later.

This might have worked, but the other brothers see an opportunity to sell Joseph to traders on their way to Egypt and they do so. Ruben is distraught that his rescue attempt failed. They all follow through with the plan and fake

Joseph's death. Israel's heart is broken thinking that Joseph is dead. Joseph, the golden child who wore royal robes, is stripped of his robe and is put in chains. Instead of going to his father to report on his brothers and rule the clan, he is on his way to Egypt as a slave.

There are a lot of ways we can look at this part of Joseph's story, and a lot we can learn from it. This beginning sets up the events in Joseph's future. Joseph's gift with dreams is used by God later to help Joseph and the whole known world of his time. Joseph and his brothers are all transformed in the end. Over it all God has a vision and all these events are used to a role in something much larger.

Perhaps a way to tie much of it together is to view this story as a metaphor for what it means to be people of God. Like Joseph we have been blessed. We are blessed to know God; to have a relationship with God. We are blessed to have an understanding that the source of the universe is loving and caring. As Christians we know that God has chosen to even take human form and die for us.

Sometimes Christians become proud at having this knowledge, instead of being humbled by it. Like Joseph we view ourselves as privileged, instead of as blessed. We think we are somehow superior to others, instead of recognizing that we are responsible for using our gifts to liberate and help others. Too often Christians spend all their time trying to make others like us, instead of trying to be a blessing to others in thanksgiving for what God has done for us.

Like Joseph we at times find ourselves in a pit. Sometimes our very attempts of liberate others lands us in trouble. That's what happened to the early martyrs. They sought to share the good news of new life in Christ and they were beaten and thrown in prison and sometimes crucified or fed to wild animals. Sometimes in our attempts to stand up against injustice, we find ourselves at odds with powers and principalities. We will see that despite those situations, God's presence and power overcomes and sees us through.

So as we leave Joseph, our dreamy hero, he is stripped of his dreamcoat and sold into slavery in Egypt. What will become of him? Will Joseph's dreams come to pass? Will he ever see his mother and father again? Will he ever forgive his brothers for what they did?

What about Joseph's family? Will the brothers ever come to terms with what they did to their own brother? Will Israel and Rachel ever find peace in their grief?

And what about the people of God? Here we have Israel and the twelve sons that become the 12 tribes. They carry the promise made to Sarah and Abraham of a great nation that will be a blessing to the nations. How will they weather this storm? How will these events move Israel closer to being a vast nation?

For the answer to these and many other questions, join us next week for the next installment of "Joseph: Beyond the Technicolor Dreamcoat."