

Exploring the Story in: Gen. 37:1-11

Who Are You?

Each of our families have a story. In this passage from Genesis, we learn about the story of Jacob's family. In the biblical narrative, Jacob is the son of Isaac and Rebekah. In verse 3 of the passage, the name Israel is used because Jacob is also known as Israel.

In this story, we learn of Jacob's son Joseph, his favorite. We also read about one of the more well-known images in scripture, Joseph's long robe, famously translated in the King James Version as a "coat of many colors." This phrase became part of modern popular culture through a Broadway musical and a Dolly Parton song of the same name. Regardless of cultural interpretations, the robe or coat is a symbol of special recognition.

The themes of envy and jealousy emerge in this passage. Joseph's brothers were jealous of their father Jacob's love for him. They also reacted negatively to Joseph's prophetic dreams of his eventual place of leadership among them. Even Jacob "rebuked" Joseph after hearing of his second dream, including his parents bowing down to him. We read that his brothers remained jealous, but his father Jacob "kept the matter in mind." Jacob seemed to have some sense of truth in Joseph's dream, despite his reaction.

How do we find our identity, in the midst of our family story? Families can be a source of love and encouragement, but families can also be broken and difficult. Like Joseph, we each have something unique about us, despite the joys and challenges of family life. We can each seek guidance from God about what our identity means for us and how that impacts the way we live our lives.

- *The Rev. Kellen Smith*

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 119:73-80, 145
- Evening Ps. 121, 6
- Gen. 37:1-11
- 1 Cor. 1:1-19
- Mark 1:1-13

Prayer

Gracious God, You call us to live within family systems. Sometimes we feel connected to our families, and at other times we do not. Lead us as we navigate who we are in the midst of family life. So that we may be confident and grateful for who we are. Through Christ, Amen.

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 34, 146
- Evening Ps. 25, 91
- Gen. 37:12-24
- 1 Cor. 1:20-31
- Mark 1:14-28

Exploring the Story in: Gen. 37:12-24

Hopes and Dreams

In the passage, Israel sends Joseph to his brothers who were with the flock. Joseph is to report back to Jacob. Joseph meets a man while he is looking for his brothers and is directed to Dothan. When Joseph's brothers saw him approaching, they decided to kill him, planning to report that a wild animal "devoured" him. Joseph's life is saved by his oldest brother, Ruben, who convinces them to leave him in a pit, but without harming Joseph. The brothers stripped Joseph of the long-sleeved robe, and abandoned him in a pit.

Joseph was called a "dreamer" by his brothers. Joseph was not afraid to speak about his dreams and share them with others, despite the consequences this had. Sometimes our own dreams lead us into unknown places, without a safety net.

In our lives, there may be forces that seek to disrupt our dreams. When we express our hopes and aspirations, there may be those who would not support us. Similarly, like Joseph, we may find ourselves alone or without the care of those we thought we could count on. The "pit" can be a dark place, without any "water" or refreshment.

How should we respond when we find ourselves in places of darkness or difficulty? One of the great gifts of our lives can be the practice of looking for hope in unexpected places. Hope is not something that is always apparent. It may be that at certain points in our lives, we can only rely on God to reveal hope to us. In letting go of our own will, we allow God to infuse hope into our lives.

- *The Rev. Kellen Smith*

Prayer

God of hope, You are the originator of hope. In the face of difficulty, deliver us to hopeful living. So that we may be stewards of the dreams you put within our hearts and minds. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exploring the Story in: Gen. 37:25-36

The Gift of Relationship

This passage continues the story of Joseph being abandoned by his brothers. Seeking to profit off Joseph, his brothers sell him to the Ishmaelites, the descendants of Ishmael. Joseph then finds himself with strangers. He is given up by his own brothers, delivered into an unknown future.

Both Joseph's oldest brother Rueben and his father mourn over Joseph's supposed death. Joseph's brothers convince their father of Joseph's death by putting the blood of a goat on his robe. Rueben and Jacob each tear their garments, which is a symbolic public display of grief. Jacob is so heartbroken, he refuses to be comforted.

We read that Joseph finds himself in Egypt and is sold to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh. Joseph was far from home, in the hands of those of another nation and culture. At different times, we each may find that we are dealing with circumstances beyond our control. An illness, a loss of a job, an ending of a friendship, moving to a new place and other changes in life can come without warning. It is important in our spiritual lives, to reach out when we are experiencing grief and dealing with change, particularly to the church family. Who in your life do you call upon when you are faced with challenges and transitions in life? Whoever is in our circle of support, we will each do well to remember God grants us the gift of relationship with others. In our lives, we are blessed to be able to nurture those relationships, so we can feel connected to others, especially in times of need.

- *The Rev. Kellen Smith*

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 5, 147:1-11
- Evening Ps. 27, 51
- Gen. 37:25-36
- 1 Cor. 2:1-13
- Mark 1:29-45

Prayer

Lord of life, Thank you for those you place into our lives with whom we develop meaningful relationships. Guide us as we deepen and strengthen the bonds of friendship and mutual support. So that we may feel more connected to the larger community of faith. Through Christ, Amen.

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 27, 147:12-20
- Evening Ps. 126, 102
- Gen. 39:1-23
- 1 Cor. 2:14-3:15
- Mark 2:1-12

Prayer

Ever-present God, You are always with us. When we face challenges, you comfort us. Help us to use all we experience to grow in our lives and faith. So that we can share your presence with the world. Through Christ, Amen.

Exploring the Story in: Gen. 39:1-23

Overcoming Obstacles

In this lengthy lectionary passage, Joseph has overcome several setbacks to find some stability in his life in Egypt. Despite being sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, we read that "the Lord was with Joseph." He succeeded and eventually Potiphar put everything he owned under Joseph's care, receiving the blessing of the Lord.

As Joseph received favor, he soon faced the advances of Potiphar's wife. Continuing to live by his own integrity, Joseph would not sleep with her, thus leading to her turning against Joseph. Potiphar's wife lies to him, saying that Joseph tried to sleep with her. Joseph is put into prison, yet the Lord was still with him. Eventually, Joseph was in charge of all the prisoners, and anything Joseph did, "the Lord made it prosper."

How have you seen adversity turn into opportunity in your life? We may not always remember that, like Joseph, the Lord is with us in whatever we do. Joseph's story is one of overcoming obstacles, and making the most out of his situation. Joseph would go on to be put in charge of the whole land of Egypt by Pharaoh. We may find that the challenges we face may lead us to see or sense God's presence in a way that we had not experienced before.

The story of Joseph expresses a similar scriptural truth as the passion narrative of Jesus. The resurrection of Christ was only made possible through his crucifixion and saving death. As Joseph was abandoned by his brothers, so was Jesus given up by his own people. In both stories, God is fully present in the emergence of new and renewed life.

- *The Rev. Kellen Smith*

Exploring the Story in: Mark 2:3-17



Valerie Coursen, *Pottery* 2000 Watercolor

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 22, 148
- Evening Ps. 105, 130
- Gen. 40:1-23
- 1 Cor. 3:16-23
- Mark 2:13-22

Prayer

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*From *The Book of Common Prayer*

Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 43, 149
- Evening Ps. 31, 143
- Gen. 41:1-13
- 1 Cor. 4:1-7
- Mark 2:23-3:6

Exploring the Story in: Mark 2:23-3:6

Reinterpretation of the Sabbath

In his life and ministry, Jesus was continually creating friction when it came to accepted social and religious norms. In this passage from Mark, Jesus is silencing his critics when it comes to working and healing on the Sabbath. Jesus is reinterpreting the Sabbath.

I wonder whom you might identify with in the passage. With Jesus, as the prophetic voice of truth against the naysayers. As one of Jesus' disciples, following the instruction of the master, even though it may lead to judgment from others. With the Pharisees, pointing to the letter of the law and what is acceptable. As a person in need of healing. Perhaps part of each character is a part of all of us.

For Christians today, how can we live into the meaning of the Sabbath? We likely all go to worship on Sundays. We may spend time in fellowship or study. Some of us may take part in outreach to those in need. Wherever we are on Sundays, however we express our faith, God invites us into living the Sabbath in a fresh and real way, in a way that is true to our time and calling.

- *The Rev. Kellen Smith*

Prayer

Lord of the Sabbath, You created the world and called it good. The Sabbath is part of your creation, as a gift to us. Help us to live in a way that honors you on the Sabbath. So that we can grow as your faithful disciples. In Jesus' name, Amen.