

Genesis 37: 1-4; 29-36

“Hang On!”

August 23, 2020

Rev. Lou Nyiri

Title Slide

The text I'll focus on this morning comes from the closing verses of Genesis 37 – however, before we get there let's set the stage by starting from the beginning of Genesis 37 – hear these words from Genesis 37:1-

4...**Scripture Slides - Genesis 37:1-4**

Title Slide

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

Come as the fire and burn,

Come as the wind and cleanse,

Come as the light and reveal,

Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,

for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

Genesis 37 begins the story of Joseph and his brothers and father Jacob (or Israel as his sons and wives sometimes called him) and it contains that story of the gift his father gave him – that “multi-colored coat” or more accurately “a long robe with sleeves” (v. 3).

The story of Joseph is one of my favorites.

I fell in love with this story before I really read it in Scripture.

I fell in love with it from Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice's musical – Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. If you know it, then feel free to sing along at home – OR – hum along here in the sanctuary...

Play Clip from Joseph & Amazing Technicolor

Okay – enough excitement for one morning.

Back to the Biblical story...

Title Slide

Jacob/Israel gives Joseph the coat and we are told “he loved [Joseph] more than any other of his children.”

This very notion incites family dissension and dysfunction as Joseph's brothers find themselves “hating” their brother to the point of not being able to “speak peaceably to him” (v.4).

Joseph finds himself in a bind because of this parental preferential treatment AND because of the way he relates to his brothers – he's been given the gift of being able to interpret dreams – and he's been having some dreams lately that are telling him about his place in his family – or rather his brother's low place below him in the family ranking. Dreams like:

- They were binding sheaves in the field and Joseph's sheaf stood taller than his brothers sheaves and their sheaves bowed to his sheaf.
- The sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him (implying that his father, his mother and his eleven older brothers would one day bow down to him) [vv. 5-11].

If we read (vv. 5-11) we'll notice that Joseph, who has this gift to interpret dreams doesn't bother to interpret the dreams for the brothers.

He remains silent.

Interpretation is left to the brothers and Jacob who ask questions which Joseph never answers.

Joseph's silence to their questions only serves to intensify familial difficulties.

Joseph acts insensitively, maybe even arrogantly and in all reality his actions serve only to exacerbate problems.

Now these dreams and the whole family system is an affront to the older brothers because...*well*, isn't it always an affront to older siblings when parents treat the younger with more latitude – maybe more gratitude – maybe more preferential treatment...whether in reality or in theory.

I state this as a matter of fact for I am the youngest of three with two older siblings who often informed me "mom and dad always loved me best."

A declaration to which, I once – ONCE - made the mistake of replying, "*Can you blame them?*"

I learned a valuable lesson that day...*when you're 12 – your 15-year-old sister hits pretty hard!*

Joseph is in the beginnings of a similar learning curve as his story unfolds in Genesis 37:12-17.

His brothers are tending sheep in a nearby town and Jacob sends Joseph out to see "if it is well with the brothers and the flocks" (v. 14) and to bring word back to Jacob.

Joseph sets off to find his brothers and learns the brothers have moved to another pasture spot some 15 miles away in a town called Dothan.

(Genesis 37:18-28)

The brothers see Joseph approaching and they begin their plot to kill him.

It becomes clear the brothers are not on the same page and two voice misgivings.

Reuben – the oldest intervenes and begs the brothers to throw Joseph into a cistern (a hole dug out to store rain water).

Reuben's unspoken plan is to return later and restore Joseph to their father.

The brothers agree and they strip Joseph of his robe (namely, his status) – they throw him into a waterless cistern (to a position *below* them) – and they sit down to eat.

As they eat, Judah who probably senses trouble speaks up.

He sees Ishmaelite traders bound for Egypt "come riding by."

Judah suggests a compromise (probably derived out of an appeal to self-interest and as a way to make a profit) – there's no gain from killing Joseph but there is if they sold him – they will not be able to conceal Joseph's blood and will bear the guilt of their actions.

The brothers agree and sell him for twenty pieces of silver.

Once in Egypt Joseph will be sold into slavery and "bought by a captain named Potiphar."

Reuben who was not with his brothers at the time returns to the pit to release Joseph and discovers the following – **Scripture Slides - Genesis 37:29-36**

Title Slide

A lot of things are going on in this chapter.
A lot of people are finding themselves in a pit.
Joseph literally finds himself in a pit.
I suggest that it's not only Joseph who finds himself in a pit.
I believe the whole family is in a pit.

They have done a lot of talking in this chapter – a lot of guessing what each other is thinking – however, no real communication has gone on – there's been no give or take...no real listening or hearing – they are deep in the pit of miscommunication...maybe even no communication.

Jacob expects a report from Joseph – receives a report about him.
Jacob hoping to hear a word of peace (a word of shalom – a sense of calmness among the siblings) instead hears something that destabilizes his life.
Jacob who gave a coat to confirm a love now receives a coat confirming a death.

And Jacob cries out for his son with deep intensity.

Scripture's description of tearing garments and wearing ashes are traditional signs of mourning.
Jacob laments for many days and his children are unable to comfort him.
He declares to them that his lament will continue until his own death, when he will go down to Sheol – when he is reunited with his son Joseph there – in that place, the Hebrews thought of as being the realm of the dead, a shadowy, silent existence.

In the few moments remaining this morning I want to focus on what it means to be in this pit.

Yet, before we go there, I want you to hear me clearly – Jacob's response to the news he received about Joseph is not an implication that we who lose the ones we love to death are supposed to grieve and move on as quickly as we can – I do not believe that – I do not support that line of thought – when we love deeply and lose the life of those we love – we will never get over it...we will move through such times with God's grace – yet we will never get over that kind of loss.

To get over implies to forget – and when one loves deeply – one never forgets.

The other thing I would like us to hear this morning is this:

When we find ourselves grieving – keeping in mind grief arises from many sources, it could be:

- the loss of a friendship
- the metaphorical death of a dream or missed opportunity
- the literal death of someone we love
- for many the discomfort we feel right now given the uncertain & unprecedented times we are living in is a form of grief – as we anticipate an unknown & yet-to-be-known future
- grief arises when something ceases to exist in our lives as we now know it

When we find ourselves in the pit of grief.

When we find ourselves surrounded by despair.

When we find ourselves wanting to shut down – like Jacob is appearing to do within his family – in those moments we need to reach out – and grab hold of the rope tossed to us and hang on!

Hang on!

Even when it seems as though God is non-existent in the situation – we must remember God is ever-present. Whether we recognize or realize God's presence – God is there!

I cannot tell you how many times I've talked to people who have said that as they went through some horrific tragedy in their lives – in those moments when they couldn't see God – they were so very thankful for the presence of family and friends who walked alongside them in their tragedy.

As many of those people looked back on their lives, sometimes long after the tragedy, they came to believe in those moments when they didn't see God – when they could only see the people around them – that those people **were** God's gifts to them...and they came to believe even more that God **was** with them in the relationships God brought into their lives during those times.

We are called to take notice and throw a rope of hope into the lives of those around us so they can hold on until good news comes back into their lives.

There are many in this world who feel as though they are living, entrenched in a pit.

- If you are one of them – hang on! ...Grab hold of the presence of God in your life right now – a presence you may or may not see – a presence that might be being revealed in your life through the people around you – grab hold of the rope of hope and hang on!
- If you are **not** one of those who feels as though life is being lived in a pit, be a person who through your words and actions is someone who lowers a rope of hope into the lives of those around you so that they have something and someone to hang on to...until they can hang onto and be embraced into God's loving arms.

We are called into places where we can be God's hands and feet at work in this world –

- people who throw ropes of hope into other people's pits...
 - people who write notes...
 - people who make phone calls...
 - people who hold zoom gatherings to keep people connected...
 - people who make welcome/health kits for others...
 - people who pray for & encourage their neighbors...in Adams County & Beyond...
 - people who remember – we need each other...

To God be the glory AND from God come our guidance.

Amen & Amen!