

Sunday, July 15, 2018

Genesis 37:1-11—selected verse to ch.42

Joseph: A Favoured Son with Dreams

What a warm and wonderful summer we are experiencing so far! It is great to be able to share with you after a short time away. In the spring I had asked for individuals to provide me with some subjects, topics, or Bible stories that you wanted to hear again, or to spend time with or even to seek answers. As the topics were suggested what was offered will be shared as individual sermons, yet what is amazing is what ties them together for me is dreams, visions and living the way of Christ! Your announcement portion of the bulletin gives a general outline of what is to come this summer and I pray that you will read the passages ahead of time in order to hear the story again- even for the first time!

Today we are focusing on the story of Joseph and his many coloured coat as found in Genesis 37. Joseph's story is not included as part of the lectionary nor are there any hymns which truly reflect the gift this young man received from his father, Jacob (aka Israel). But for some people the Broadway musical, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat" has more than told the story of a favoured child, extreme sibling rivalry and how family members respond to a situation of survival after famine hits the region. From the time when Joseph is sold as a slave to his becoming a key leader for pharaoh, there is a story filled with anger, dreams and visions as well as a resolution of family dynamics which sees the entire family change focus as one is honoured and given authority beyond the coat..

The story of Joseph is found in the Old Testament in chapters 37-47 and I invite you to read it in its entirety for the sake of the great story of Joseph's faith that it is.

But what started out as an acknowledgement of love by Jacob to his favourite son, turns out to be the beginning of family conflict to the extreme. Joseph has many siblings but he is favoured by his father. To honour him Jacob gives a coat of many bright colours, with sleeves and of course this begins the jealousy of the brothers. This gift of this coloured coat would come as an extravagance—colours of fabric during the time would have been plain, simple shading using the roots and leaves of any local vegetation to dye the plain coloured materials of the time. To have sleeves was an added expense for a shepherd boy who would most likely grow out of it. Sleeves were not a part of the regular over clothes as tunics covered only the person's body. Jacob sees Joseph as a gentleman and would do no work as he was always reading or dreaming. So for Jacob to present a colourful coat to his 17 year old son, a shepherd, it was an

unnecessary gift as seen by his brothers. Joseph received this extravagant gift from his dad Jacob as a gift of love. But this was not the only gift Joseph received.

As we continue to read the story of Joseph however we soon learn that his brothers were jealous, envious and truly did not like him at all. They plotted to kill him and if it was not for Reuben they would have. Instead they sold him to merchants on their way to Egypt. The brothers then had to lie to their father about what happened to his favourite son. Not only were they terrible for having sold him, they had to make up the story of his death and presented a blood stained colourful coat to their father. He deeply grieved Joseph.

But while this was going on Joseph was doing well in Potiphar's house, "The Lord was with Joseph". Joseph remained faithful to God's teachings even when Potiphar's wife 'found favour with him". Yet Joseph knew he had not done anything wrong. Even in prison he did well and was put in charge of the prisoners. The Lord was with him and God had a purpose for his life which soon came to be known.

As a young man he had dreamed that his sheaf of wheat rose and stood upright while those of his brothers gathered around his and bowed down. He did not fully understand what this dream meant but one day this dream did come true.

Why is this an important story for us to hear, remember and learn about? Because God still offers gifts to us many gifts and if we keep our faith focused on him, we will succeed not only in this life, but know that we will be with him forever. What is important about the gifts God gives is in how we recognize them, honour them, use them and acknowledge from where they come. Joseph's coat was a symbol of love from his father. But when his father sees the coat in tatters and he is not with his brothers, the coat is then seen as a source of comfort as the father grieves. It is a sign of love, but also a sign of love lost to grief.

Yet the story of Joseph does not end there because the other gift Joseph received- not from his father, Jacob, but from his heavenly father God. God gave him the ability to dream and to interpret these dreams. He could also interpret the dreams of others and as he does interpret the dreams his role in life changes from slave boy to a key leader in Pharaoh's court. Joseph is the one who understands the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker both fellow prisoners at one time. But these interpretations lead to Joseph hearing Pharaoh's dreams of fat and healthy cows being eaten by ugly and scrawny and lean ones. With Joseph's interpretation of these dreams of 7 years of good crops and 7 years of famine Joseph is recognized as one to be trusted by the Pharaoh. In order for his country and outlying areas to be prepared for the years

of famine, Joseph begins the arduous task of saving for the future. This was the first food bank whereby a portion of each good crop year was saved for the time when there would not be a harvest.

As a result of this famine across the region, the story moves from Joseph in Egypt back to Jacob and his brothers who are indeed hurting due to lack of food. So they travel to Egypt in search of food. And it is when they are in the pharaoh's court that Joseph recognizes his family-brothers and they must bow down to him. Just like in a dream he had many years before. But they do not recognize them.

Joseph then tells them what they must do in order to receive the grain they and their family members need. They leave and later return when Joseph eventually reveals who he is and asks to see his father. Much to the delight of their father, the rivalry ends and Joseph tells them that it was God who led him to Egypt in order to save lives. It was God who sent Joseph ahead of them to preserve a remnant on earth and to save the lives by a great deliverance. God had been with Joseph his whole life and God's purpose for Joseph was revealed not only in interpreting dreams, but to save lives.

Dreams- Joseph dreamt that one day his brothers would bow down to him. He did not know under which circumstances it was to occur. Joseph also interpreted the pharaoh's dream when others could not and because of this he quickly rose in the royal court. Joseph also had dreams of his own but even when Potiphar's wife betrayed him, he did not let go of the dreams. He merely kept them within himself.

Why do we dream? Because dreams allow us to store up memories, to sort out events from the past and to help us to look to the future. Dreams go along with wishes but from within our mind and when we think of dreams we might even think of fantasies or what is not real or even possible.

The Lord was with Joseph throughout his life. Do we understand that the dream he had first shared with his brothers about them bowing down to him would come true when this young man had no idea of what lay ahead of him. His family looked after and raised livestock. What would dreaming about having others bow down really mean?

From where do dreams arise? And should we put our life on the line for them? Just what are dreams and how do they vary from visions and wishes? Cinderella sings that 'dreams are wishes your heart makes when you're fast asleep'. But when we dream we must also realize

that it is our minds which are actively seeing visions, thinking and where other sensations are at play.

Dreams are important part of life but when we think of Joseph's life and that the Lord was with him, we might realize that it was God who knew the big picture around Joseph's life and how he was able to serve others and save his family. Forgiveness occurs between the brothers and the father's grief turns to joy.

Joseph continued to be ruler of Egypt second only to the pharaoh and because he was faithful to God throughout his life, God enable his family to come and live together with him. The entire family migrates to Egypt where Joseph ensures them all that they will be safe and prosper. God was with this family and by faith all are cared for through God's guidance and strength. And it all started with a dream and this dream changed their whole lives, but not their faith in God. They believed God would look after them all, and they did.

How confident are we in our dreams, visions and thoughts, that we fully trust God to lead us to where He wants us to go. We dare to dream of a world at peace. But this must begin in our own lives, families and wherever we interact with others. Dreams are more than visions if we put them into practise and trust God to lead our lives wherever we are called.

Let us pray:

God we thank you for Joseph's ability to dream and mostly his willingness to follow you in faith and to trust you with his life. Thank you for this story which helps us to take heart and to reflect on our dreams and hopes and visions and we pray that these are what you continue to bless us with as we share in ministry of Christ one with another. Make our visions come true as we seek to become one with each other in faith. Amen.