

## Joseph Comes Out

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Sunday, February 24, 2019

Genesis 45:3-11, 15/ Luke 6:27-38

The 91<sup>st</sup> annual Academy Awards air tonight. If they had been giving Oscars 4,000 years ago, the award for best drama might go to God, and best actor to Joseph.

You may remember the story of Joseph from Sunday school, or from the stage musical that later was released on video starring Donnie Osmond. As you may recall, Joseph's brothers tried to murder him by throwing him into a pit. When he lived, they, instead, sold him as a slave. Although that seems a bit dramatic, Joe really had alienated his brothers.



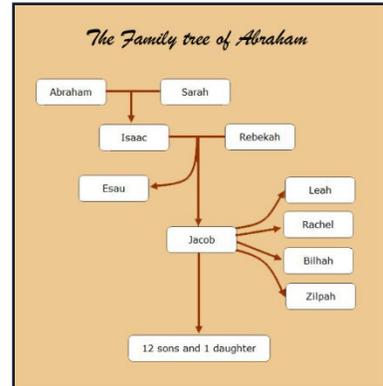
Joseph was a dreamer, right from the start. In one of his dreams, Joseph saw his sheaf lifted higher than his brothers. A dream in which a younger sibling lords something over his older brothers is bad enough, but Joseph was foolish enough to tell them his dream over breakfast the next morning.



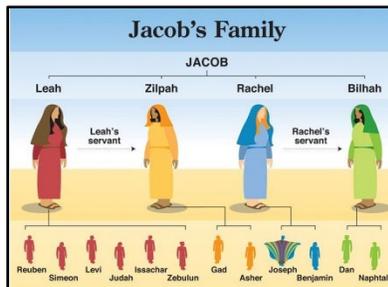
The brother's resentment was compounded because Joseph was his father's pet, and they were reminded of that every time he wore his multi-colored coat that their father had given him. There may have been favorites in your family, so perhaps you can understand a bit how the brothers felt.

Already, you can tell this is the Biblical model for a dysfunctional family. It isn't Joseph's fault. It started with his great-grandfather, Abraham. You remember Abraham, how he thought God was telling him to sacrifice Joseph's grandfather, Isaac.

Who knows how much psychological damage that did to Isaac? He certainly didn't grow up to be the healthiest adult. Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twin boys. Isaac loved Esau best, and Rebekah loved Jacob most.



Jacob, Joseph's father, turned out to be his own kind of dysfunctional. He tricked his father into giving him the patrilineal blessing that should have gone to Esau because he was the first twin born. If that weren't enough, Jacob then tricked Esau into selling him his birthright for a bowl porridge.



Esau was peeved, so Jacob went to live with an uncle who tricked Jacob into marrying the wrong daughter. In the end, Jacob married both daughters. They have kids. Oh, he also has kids with their maid-servants.

So, most of Joseph's brothers were stepbrothers, but, because Joseph's mother, Rachel, was the daughter Jacob wanted to marry in the first place, Joseph, her first-born, was Jacob's favorite, which is how he ended up with a rainbow-colored coat.



Joseph's stepbrothers apparently were fashion critics, so, one day, when their father sent Joseph into the fields with a message, they decided to get rid of him. After tossing him into a pit, they eventually sold Joseph as a slave to a group of nomads wandering by.

Unbeknownst to them, Joseph eventually wound up in Egypt, where Pharaoh got wind of the fact that Joseph was a gifted dream interpreter. He decided to see what Joseph could do with a couple of wild ones he'd had himself. Eventually, after Joseph's interpretations were correct, Pharaoh promoted him to be his righthand man.

This is where we pick up the story in this morning's lesson.

Years later, Joseph's brothers, who had forgotten about him long ago, turned up in Egypt looking for food because of a terrible famine across the region. Because of Joseph's dream interpretation, the Egyptians were prospering during this time.

When the brothers arrived, Joseph recognized them immediately, but, because he was wearing fancy clothes and speaking Egyptian, they didn't recognize him. This was the perfect opportunity for Joseph to exact revenge. At first, it looked like that was what he would do, but his compassion won out. So, instead, he then invited them to live in Egypt and to bring old Jacob, their father, too.



Joseph coming out to his brothers is an Oscar-worthy scene. God seems to be fond of surprising plot twists. Because these 12 brothers are considered the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel, God also must have a soft spot for dysfunctional families, which is a good thing because that seems to be the only

kind of families there are. So, don't be dismayed if you have one, because we all do.

Oh, we like to pretend otherwise, but most of us are like the fellow who had someone look up his family tree. Later, he was at a party and someone asked him how much he had spent on the service. When he said that he'd paid \$10,000. His friend was shocked and said, "It sounds like you got ripped off. I had my family tree done and it cost me only \$1,000."

Without flinching the first fellow replied, "Oh, I paid only \$1,000 to look it up; the other \$9,000 was to cover it up."

If someone wanted to make a tell-all movie about us and our family, we might pay them good money not to.

The point the bible is trying to make today, however, is that no matter what kind of mess our family made, and no matter what kind of mistakes we have made, none of it disqualifies us from God's family or from being used by God. In fact, all that mess in our past might be used by God to help those in need.

In the next chapter of Genesis, Joseph said to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." That may be the very attitude we all must take about the mistakes we have made, or the bad things that have been done to us, if we ever are going to have a chance to live out the instructions Jesus gave us in today's Gospel lesson.

This is how what Jesus said reads in *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible:

*To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard*

*time, respond with the energies of prayer for them... No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously. Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then take the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Everyone does that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that. Help and give without expecting a return. Live out this God-created identity the way our God lives toward us, generously and graciously. Even when we're at our worst our God is kind; so you be kind. Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, or criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.*

Talk about great expectations! I don't know any way to live like this without a keen awareness of our own imperfections and need for grace. If we pretend we are perfect people from perfect families then we don't have to acknowledge that it is only by God's grace that we are doing as well as we are.

Living in places like New Canaan makes it hard for us to admit our lives are messy and that we need God's mercy. If we can't acknowledge our need, however, it is hard for us to extend that kind of grace to others, which is what Jesus requires.

Shortly after this country was founded, a young family settled deep in the woods of western Kentucky. They were several days journey from a settlement where they could trade for supplies. One day, the man made the supply run alone,

leaving the mother and kids at home. Shortly after he left, the woman was working in the garden and stepped on a rattlesnake, which bit her several times. Knowing she would die before her husband returned, she ran inside and began cooking all the food in the house so the children wouldn't go hungry when they were all alone.



As the stove heated the kitchen of the little cabin, the poison began to spread through her body and sweat poured from her in puddles. Her clothes soon were soaked, and she began to feel weak.

Finally, when she had cooked everything, she called the kids and told them she was going to take a long nap. She assigned them the chores and told them to take care of one another while she slept. She showed them what to eat for the next several days, then she drifted into unconsciousness.

Days later, when the farmer returned, the children ran to tell him that mommy had been sleeping for a long time. He found her unconscious but still alive. He put her and the kids in the wagon and made the long journey to the nearest doctor.

By the time they arrived, she had regained consciousness. The doctor explained that the heat from the cooking caused the mother to sweat out enough of the poison to survive. Her exertion to feed her children had cleansed her of the poisons and saved her.

Joseph might have treated his brothers the way that they had treated him. Instead, he fed them a feast of mercy, grace, and forgiveness because he had



learned that, although they may have meant the bad he suffered for evil, God used it for good.

If we don't let the pain of our life help us, then all it can do is hurt us and hurt others. Which it does is up to us.