

Week 10, Sunday: Joseph, Potiphar's Wife, Prison, and Dreams
Genesis 39,40

For Journaling or Discussing with Another:

Read Genesis 39:1-6a

- In what or ways do you sense that like Joseph, God has been with you causing some aspect of your life to prosper?
- We may have a sense of certain others being particularly gifted by God. How have you been blessed, like Potiphar, by your association with someone else wise or determined, compassionate or just?

Read Genesis 39:6b-23

- Stories of sexual temptation, tension, and abuse keep showing up in Genesis. In the world of the story, what are the benefits of righteous behavior?
- How does this intersect with your story?
- Recall a time you experienced injustice. How has this experience shaped you?

Read Genesis 40:1-23

- Have you ever sensed God active in your dreams? If so, recall something that was revealed to you?
- Have you ever recounted a dream to another person and asked for help with interpretation? If so, what was that like?
- The chapter ends with the announcement that Joseph has been left in prison and forgotten. Recall a time that you felt forgotten. How has that experience shaped you?

Continued blessings engaging Genesis, Tom Maehl, First Lutheran Church, Waltham, MA

Week 10, Monday: Shrewdness

Scripture: Genesis 41:1-36

After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, 'I remember my faults today. Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.'

Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.' Joseph answered Pharaoh, 'It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me.'

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.'

Reflection: Joseph has been remembered - remembered by the cup bearer and by God. He is now on the brink of assuming a position of great power. What a strong leader he will be: a person of integrity, deeply faithful, visionary, and bold. He is also shrewd.

Having been long forgotten in prison, all of a sudden his moment arrives and Joseph is invited to an audience with Pharaoh. Picture the scene. Mighty Pharaoh, believed to be an earthly representation of the gods, in all his finery, there with this Hebrew foreigner dressed in prison garb. I suspect most of us would be intimidated, not Joseph! Pharaoh recounts his dream and Joseph dutifully offers the interpretation; but then notice how Joseph shrewdly seizes the moment and keeps on speaking. Without a pause he continues with instruction, “*Now let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the of Egypt.*” Mmmm, wonder who might fit that description? Then, just in case Pharaoh is still wondering that too, Joseph goes on to begin fulfilling the role he has just described. Claiming discernment and wisdom, Joseph advises, “*Appoint overseers, gather one-fifth of the food, prepare for storage.*” Throughout all of this, Pharaoh has not said a word.

Jesus said, “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) Honest and faithful leadership does not have to be soft and meek. Joseph’s shrewdness and boldness move him into a position of great authority through which God will be at work in powerful ways.

To Ponder:

- Who are your role models for acting with boldness and shrewdness? What have you learned from their example?
- Joseph’s leadership characteristics include vision, courage, faithfulness, wisdom, boldness, and shrewdness. What one leadership characteristic would you ask God’s help in developing?

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, but always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 86)

Week 10, Tuesday: Joseph Prepared

Scripture: Genesis 41:37-57

The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.' And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, 'Bow the knee!' Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.' Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, 'For', he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' The second he named Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.'

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.' And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Reflection: Joseph was 30 years old when he began his service to Pharaoh. The previous thirteen years was a time of great uncertainty, but also of powerful formation. Recall that as a boy Joseph was a bit soft; doted upon by his father, arrogant with his brothers, spared from much hard labor. Then at age seventeen he was sold into slavery and a time of honing for leadership began. After a frightening period travelling with his captors, he was then sold to Potiphar and had his first experiences with administration. Then having been unjustly accused, he spent years in prison where he assumed other responsibilities. These were trying times; yet through it all he lived faithfully, developed skills, and emerged prepared to lead; and the food management program he develops and administers will mean life for multitudes.

We may have a sense of God's fingerprints all over this story. With Joseph ending up first with slave traders who happened to have connections in Egypt; then arriving in Potiphar's house where in his early 20s he'd have some positive, but not too big, management experiences; then being thrown into the part of the prison that happened to also house the dreaming cupbearer and baker; and then finally, after a period of deprivation, being led into this position of massive responsibility and authority. All of this so that eventually his entire clan, God's chosen people, will find provision in Egypt.

This is not to say that God willed his enslavement and incarceration; those realities were the fruits of human cruelty. It is to say, however, that God was with Joseph in everything; using even terrible circumstances to shape him.

To Ponder: Consider your own journey between the ages of 17 and 30,
(*or between 17 and the current moment if you are not yet 30*):

- Where did you study? Work? travel?
- Where did you experience struggle? Where surprising opportunity?
- What skills were developed in you?
- In what ways do you have a sense of God's fingerprints being on your story?

Prayer: O God, thank you for being a companion on my journey. Thank you for leading me into experiences where I have been shaped and deepened. Thank you for carrying me onward when I have failed. Thank you for sending comforters when I have suffered. Thank you for giving me a role to play in your ongoing work of healing the world's brokenness. Amen.

Week 10, Wednesday: Character Development

Scripture: Genesis 42

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard', he said, 'that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.' So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. 'Where do you come from?' he said. They said, 'From the land of Canaan, to buy food.' Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, 'You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!' They said to him, 'No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies.' But he said to them, 'No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!' They said, 'We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more.' But Joseph said to them, 'It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.' And he put them all together in prison for three days.

On the third day Joseph said to them, 'Do this and you will live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die.' And they agreed to do so. They said to one another, 'Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us.' Then Reuben answered them, 'Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.' They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them.

They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging-place, he saw his money at the top of the sack. He said to his brothers, 'My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!' At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ‘The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. But we said to him, “We are honest men, we are not spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.” Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, “By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.” ’

As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one’s sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. And their father Jacob said to them, ‘I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!’ Then Reuben said to his father, ‘You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.’ But he said, ‘My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to Sheol.’

Reflection: The story is moving. Through the famine and Joseph’s change of fortune, God is slowly and steadily moving toward the goal of getting Jacob’s family to Egypt. The characters are moving too. Upon seeing his brothers, Joseph is moved to tears. He then acts in a way toward them that at first might seem like revenge. The purpose of revenge, however, is inflicting harm; Joseph’s plans for this family, however, will ultimately lead to healing.

Notice how Joseph is giving his brothers a small taste of what he himself suffered: they are all imprisoned, yet only briefly; then one is isolated and left to be potentially forgotten; then when the others discover the money in their sacks, they are confronted by the image of a future that seems impossibly and unfairly hopeless. The narrator tells us that this moves them to a place of remorse and compassion.

The brothers are moving in their personal growth, however not yet their father. Jacob is still fixated on his devotion to one son over all the others, now Rachel’s other son Benjamin. When Jacob says, “Simeon is no more,” he is admitting that he is willing to leave Simeon to die in Egypt as long as Benjamin is protected. If Jacob is going to move, he will need help. It is Reuben who steps up; he looks lovingly at his father and then offers his own life. When he says, “*Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back,*” it’s not necessarily that he imagines Jacob murdering two grandsons; rather it is his way of stating that he will return Benjamin safely or he, himself will die trying.

To Ponder: Consider persons who like Joseph have experienced oppression; perhaps because of race, gender, sexual orientation, being differently abled, etc. Recall an experience that moved you to a place of deeper understanding and/or empathy? What might you be willing to sacrifice in an effort to move toward justice and reconciliation?

Prayer: Lord, help us to follow you in choosing love over hatred, sacrifice over safety; and move us to a deeper, fuller humanity. Amen.

Week 10, Thursday: Bi-Cultural Joseph

Scripture: Genesis 43

Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, 'Go again, buy us a little more food.' But Judah said to him, 'The man solemnly warned us, saying, "You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you." If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, "You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you." ' Israel said, 'Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?' They replied, 'The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, "Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?" What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, "Bring your brother down"?' Then Judah said to his father Israel, 'Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame for ever. If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.'

Then their father Israel said to them, 'If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.' So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, 'Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.' The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, 'It is because of the money, replaced in our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys.' So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. They said, 'Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; and when we came to the lodging-place we opened our sacks, and there was each one's money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us. Moreover, we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.' He replied, 'Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money.' Then he brought Simeon out to them. When the steward had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there.

When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. He inquired about their welfare, and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!' With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Serve the meal.' They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

Reflection: The famine rages on and Jacob and his sons debate what to do. Neglecting Simeon who is still imprisoned, they are reluctant to return for concern of what might happen to Benjamin. Finally, however, lack of food drives them to Egypt.

In a poignant scene, the brothers are brought to Joseph who upon seeing his brother Benjamin is overcome with emotion. After composing himself, Joseph invites them to a lavish meal; however, they do not sit together for we learn that Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews. Note that Joseph is not just *disguised* as an Egyptian here, he *is* an Egyptian; not ethnically perhaps, but certainly culturally. Joseph dresses and speaks as an Egyptian; he has an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife, and Egyptian children. He is what we might call today, "bi-cultural." As an Egyptian, he will faithfully and with integrity perform his work administering the food distribution program by which thousands of Egyptians will be cared for. As a Hebrew, a member of God's chosen people, he will also take part in God's expansive plans that are leading to a deeper and wider deliverance.

In our church communities, only some of us are literally bi-cultural. However, if we think about the faith community as a culture – with its own music, customs, values, and norms – then in a way all of us are bi-cultural. On the one hand, we participate in the culture of the wider society, and through our efforts in our varied vocations others are cared for. Then, on the other hand, we are part of Christ's body, woven into the community of the Church, through which we too take part in God's expansive plans that are leading to a deeper and wider deliverance.

To Ponder: In what ways does your work (paid or volunteer) benefit society? In what ways does your faith and your responsibility to the faith community influence your work and life?

Prayer: Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ dignified our labor by sharing our toil. Guide us with your justice in the workplace, so that we may never value things above people, or surrender honor to love of gain or lust for power. Prosper all efforts to put an end to work that brings no joy, and teach us how to govern the ways of business to the harm of none and for the sake of the common good; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 78)

Week 10, Friday: The Story's Climax

Scripture: Genesis 44

Then he commanded the steward of his house, 'Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the top of his sack. Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.' And he did as Joseph told him. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, 'Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, "Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this."'

When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. They said to him, 'Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover, the rest of us will become my lord's slaves.' He said, 'Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free.' Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. Joseph said to them, 'What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?' And Judah said, 'What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found.' But he said, 'Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.'

Then Judah stepped up to him and said, 'O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, "Have you a father or a brother?" And we said to my lord, "We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead; he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him." Then you said to your servants, "Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him." We said to my lord, "The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die." Then you said to your servants, "Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more." When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. And when our father said, "Go again, buy us a little food", we said, "We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us." Then your servant my father said to us, "You know that my wife bore me two sons; one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. If you take this

one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to Sheol.” Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, “If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.” Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father.’

Reflection: We are approaching the climax of the story when Joseph will finally reveal himself to his brothers. Perhaps from God’s perspective, however, the climax of the story is already here. Recall all the violence, deceit, and disharmony thus far in the stories of this family; including Hagar cast out, Esau cheated by Jacob, Jacob cheated by Laban, Dinah Raped, and Joseph sold into slavery. There is real suffering, yet God is always there behind the scenes; and now something is changing, more specifically a human heart is changing, Judah’s.

Judah had been complicit in the cold-hearted scheme to sell one of his favored brothers into slavery. Now, he is offering to sacrifice his own life for the sake of this other favored brother, and for the sake of his father whom he loves. “Take me instead,” he says; “I trade my life for his; please I beg of you, let him go free.”

One human being now willing to sacrifice his life for another, from God’s perspective perhaps this is the climax of this story. This parallels the climax of our story. We are the ones who in some fashion are complicit in the world’s oppression and suffering. God hears the cry of the oppressed. God enters the story in the person of Jesus seeking liberation for the oppressed. Then Jesus becomes our brother offering his life in sacrifice for ours. “I trade my life for theirs.” Jesus says. “Please I beg of you, let him go free.”

To Ponder: How does the Gospel message that Jesus, in deep love, offers his own life in place of yours, effect your heart for others?

Prayer:

For me kind Jesus, was thine incarnation,
thy mortal sorrow, and thy life’s oblation;
thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion,
for my salvation.

Therefore kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee;
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving,
not my deserving

(From “Ah, Holy Jesus,” text by Johann Heermann, ELW#349)