

May 3, 2020
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Title: Through Hell to Wholeness
Genesis 37: 5-7



Joseph's brothers despised him. They had their reasons. As number 11 son, Joseph had ten older brothers to try and keep up with. Or as he saw it, he had ten older brothers to tattle on. That keeps a little feller pretty busy. Only thing is, he's not so little anymore. The story we just read says he was seventeen, that makes the brothers in their twenties at least. The older brothers went out to work the sheep; they'd travel with the sheep taking them on to new pastures to feed. Sometimes it would take them far away from home. Ten young men working away from a father's watchful eye might be able to find some mischief.

The text said, "Joseph went along and watched them," (he watched the brothers not the sheep), and the text said he "brought a bad report back to their father." No one likes a tattle-tale, a spy, a party-pooper. No one likes "a bad report." The brothers grew to hate Joseph-the tattler. Their resentment went deeper than this one event. There's a back story here.

We've meet Joseph's father in the last two week's sermons. Joseph and his eleven brothers are the sons of Jacob. You remember Jacob was his mother's favorite, stole his brother's birthright by tricking his blind father.

Jacob had the dreams about the ladder and the wrestler - who changed his name to Israel. Now, we meet his sons, and the family dysfunction indeed grows from generation to generation in the twelve tribes of Israel.

These twelve brothers were half brothers. They were all Jacob's sons, but there were four different mothers. Jacob had two wives, and each wife had a female servant (who also bore him children.) - as customary at the time. The two wives competed for Jacob's love my giving him babies. Leah won the baby contest, but Jacob still loved Rachel best. Joseph was her first born. Joseph, was his father's favorite son. Remember Jacob had been his mother's favorite; he knew favorite sons got special goodies.

Jacob did not hide his special love for Joseph. The modern translations say Jacob made Joseph "a long robe with sleeves." That's the robe the King James Version described as "the coat of many colors." Translating the particular word used to name Joseph's garment has proven difficult over the years; the original meaning of the Hebrew was obscure. There is only one other place in the scripture that we find the same word, and there we get more of a description and a hint as to its meaning.

In 2 Samuel 13:18, King David's daughter, Tamar was described, with the same word to described Joseph's outfit along with this note:"for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed."

Joseph was wearing an "ornamental tunic that virgin daughters of kings wore." Joseph was wearing a "little princess dress." Why was Joseph at seventeen running through the sheep pastures wearing a little princess dress? I don't know. It was a gift from his father. Maybe his father just liked dressing him up in a princess tunic. Maybe Jacob just liked dressing up in princess clothes. Maybe there was more to it, we don't know, but what we do know is that his brothers hated him all the more for it.

Joseph fueled his brothers hatred by tattling, by being the favorite, and by wearing the princess robe and by talking too much. One night Joseph had a dream, the next morning he

said, "Listen up brothers, let me tell you about my dream. We were out in the field binding up the grain. Suddenly, my grain all stood up tall, your grain all gathered around it and bowed down to mine! Isn't that fun?!"

As you might guess, the big brothers did not think it the least bit funny that this tattle-tale, pain in the princess dress thought they would bow down to him. The scripture says, "So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words."

Joseph must not have watched my video on dream interpretation last week. Point one, no one can interpret your dreams but you. Point two, you dreams are for your own growth. We aren't given a dream to boost our ego or to tell us how others are going to worship us. We aren't given a dream to flaunt it over others. Dreams come to bring healing and wholeness. Dreams are for your own growth. So while Joseph was being tormented by his older brothers, maybe the Dream Giver offered him a dream to help him heal from their bullying. The dream says, Someday it will be okay. Someday the tables will turn. You can get through this; it gets better. Your identity is not what your brothers say about you. Now, those are all healing and wholeness messages **for Joseph.**

Instead of learning from his dream, and taking comfort that for now, his brothers are mean, but you'll get thought it. Instead of drawing strength from it for his own growth process to endure the tough times, Joseph tells his brothers his dream. I suspect he flaunts it a bit. His brothers heard Joseph's dream as Ego centric, arrogant, and inflated, these are not charming qualities that draws family closer. Joseph didn't learn from his dream, and he faced consequences.

The story continues as his brothers stuff him in a water well, then retrieve him to sell him into traveling caravan. Remember, Everyone and everything in most of our dreams is an aspect of us. Joseph was quick to see himself as the sheaf of wheat. He was quick to interpret his dream.

But also remember, dreams are given to us for our learning - not our bragging.

Dreams also, have many levels. Joseph's dream was given to sooth the difficult days with his brothers, but his dream also had a prophetic level.

Joseph had some hard work to do. His ego had to be dealt with before prophetic could come to pass.

The Jewish story-tellers were wise. The stories we read in their Hebrew history tell us about so many levels of understanding. Like dreams they are full of symbols and messages to bring us to wholeness. Carl Jung- speaks of our 'path of individuation' - our journey to wholeness. He also said, many people get stuck or refuse to 'grow up', Jung defines sins as "purposely refusing to become conscious' (whole) . Our dreams can be about helping us face the hard truths and grow up, become enlightened, new creations.

That is the message of our faith traditions. Gifts, practices, teachings showing us How to grow and mature into the fullness of who we are meant to be. How to see our opportunities - even the difficulties - as places where we can learn and grow. These ancient Hebrew writers, and the Greek early church and the teachings of Jesus weave together stories of God's grace and love - given to people in the midst of difficult times - to bring comfort for today, and hope for tomorrow, and growth in new life.

May we learn and grow in Christ. Amen.