

I want more Joseph.

The lectionary gives us only a snippet of what the Joseph cycle in Genesis has to offer. We heard last week about his being sold off to Egypt by his brothers. Today we hear about his triumph in Egypt and his reconciliation with his brothers. These are important points in the story, but there is so much more.

I want more Joseph. I suspect you might be a little more interested too.

The story begins way before the “Technicolor Dreamcoat”. Jacob had two sons with his favorite wife Rachel. Joseph was firstborn and Benjamin was last. Rachel died in childbirth with Benjamin. With the children being all Jacob had left of Rachel, he protected and doted on them. While this may be understandable, it didn’t make his other sons happy.

Joseph was also one annoying teenager. It wasn’t enough to be favored, Joseph was a dreamer. He had serious dreams. If he’d kept these dreams to himself, the whole story may have turned out differently. But – he didn’t.

He told his brothers about his dreams. His brothers' sheaves of grain bowing toward his sheaf. They were not happy. The sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. This time he did irritate his father, but not enough to curb the brothers' jealousy.

And so, Joseph finds himself in a waterless well, and then sold to a caravan headed to Egypt. The brothers took care of their jealousy and at the same time sent their father into a grief-stricken existence.

At this point, an interesting story of intrigue is placed between another of Jacob's sons – Judah – and the consequences of his sexual choices. I'm unsure if it is there as a commercial break against unethical behavior or just comic relief. Check out chapter 38 of Genesis and let me know your opinion.

Meanwhile, Joseph is delivered to the court of Pharaoh by his new 'owner' – Potiphar. The two of them got off to a good relationship. Joseph learned how to oversee the household and Potiphar used that knowledge to take off on a military excursion or just some time away.

Apparently, he spent enough time away that his wife (who shall remain nameless...really) decided to seduce the good-looking Joseph.

Joseph was smart enough to evade Mrs. Potiphar, but not smart enough to get away with his clothes. She made complaint to her husband, who sent Joseph to jail. Again, Joseph used his charm to befriend his jailer and become his unpaid assistant.

Oh, I'm sorry. It wasn't Joseph's charm. It was the Lord's doing. All of it.

Remember that. It's important.

Time passes. Joseph meets up with two of the servants of Pharaoh's court. This time, they are the dreamers and Joseph becomes the interpreter of dreams. The wine steward finds out that he will be restored to the court vineyards. The baker finds his head on a spike, just as predicted. Joseph insists that the interpretation is from God and not himself. Maybe that's why the wine steward forgets all about Joseph once he's gotten his job back.

Fast forward two years. Now Pharoah is doing the dreaming. Fat cows eat skinny cows. Plump ears of grain eat skinny ears of grain. What does this mean except that it's better not to be skinny? Suddenly the wine guy remembers Joseph.

Pharoah tells Joseph to interpret his dreams. Joseph tells the Pharoah that God is sending a famine. That's the bad news. The good news is that they have seven years to prepare for it. Joseph ends his interpretation telling Pharoah that he needs to assign someone to oversee the building of silos and storage units to get ready.

Joseph gets the job, and the ring, and the fancy clothes. Everything was restored to Joseph that was lost that day in Dothan. Everything but what really mattered.

There was no Twitter-verse in those days. The people living in Canaan didn't get the message about the upcoming famine and so didn't store up grain to feed themselves or their livestock. They were living a disaster. Word did get to them that Egypt had grain to spare.

So, Jacob sent his sons (all but Benjamin) to Egypt to beg for grain so that they wouldn't starve. They had no idea what awaited them.

Joseph recognized them right away. He accused them of being spies, even though he knew they weren't. He threw them in prison. He agreed to sell them grain only if a solo brother went back to Canaan and brought back Benjamin. Joseph let them know in no uncertain terms what pain he went through and he was going to give some of it back. But, he would also have mercy, as he returns their money to them secretly.

When that grain has been eaten, Simeon convinces Jacob to let Benjamin come along to buy more. Joseph sees them coming and orders a banquet prepared for the brothers. They buy their grain and all head back to Canaan. As they are about to depart, they are detained and their money and the cup that Benjamin drank from at the banquet found in their grain bags. They are all hauled back to Joseph who accuses them of theft and tells them that Benjamin must stay in Egypt. The brothers plead for mercy.

Finally, Joseph reveals the secret. He reconciles with his brothers and tells them to bring the whole family to Egypt, to the land of Goshen. And, that my friends, is how the Hebrew people ended up in Egypt and will require deliverance a few generations down the road.

Okay – you got more Joseph. Why?

There is a set pattern in this story that can inform us in our journeys today.

Each time Joseph rises to prominence, an event causes a complication: the pit, Mrs. Potiphar, a Pharaoh's dream, the reappearance of estranged relatives. He's sent to prison, betrayed, and forgotten. The response Joseph had to these events is key.

At no time did Joseph throw himself a pity party. In each circumstance, he took the gifts God gave him and put them to use. He gave God the glory when he could. He showed mercy when he could have let anger take the reins. He forgave the sins of his brothers and re-established their relationships when it would have been easier to send them away. He looked at his life and in hindsight saw the work of God at every step – even the hard times.

One day, we are going to look back at these times. We will see where God is working in and through us to bring the kingdom near. Will we be able, like Joseph, to see hardships as opportunities to grow and give glory to God?

That's the question.

Amen.