

Epiphany 7c: 2/24/19  
St. Paul's, Wallingford CT  
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd

[Put on multi-colored shawl...]

Lookin' pretty good today, huh?

Oh, there I go again!

Calling attention to myself, fishing for compliments.

I know I shouldn't, but it's in my DNA. (Literally.)

You see, I'm Josephina – sister, *twin* sister of Joseph, who you just heard about in that first reading.

Oh, but that was just the tiniest snippet of our long family saga that takes up about a quarter of the whole big book of Genesis.

Maybe you remember our story from Sunday school.

Or maybe you've seen or heard the musical about us, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

But what you don't remember is *me*.

I'm not actually mentioned in any of it.

So just trust me that I've come here today in the guise of Josephina, twin sister of Joseph, with a story you need to hear.

And let's face it, even if I did exist, my story might well have gotten lost in the midst of all those guys – twelve brothers and our father, Jacob.

And it's with father Jacob that our story begins.

You may recall that he had his own epic sibling rivalry with his brother Essau. (You can read that in Genesis too.)

But by the time this story picks up, Jacob is an old man who's had multiple wives and a bunch of kids.

Most of the older sons came from his wife Leah;

the younger – like Joseph – came from his wife Rachel.

And, yes, Rachel was his favorite wife he waited forever to marry.

(That's all there in Genesis as well.)

Speaking of favorites, Joseph was a favorite – *the* favorite, by far.

Jacob didn't even try to hide it.

He fawned over Joseph and gave him that flashy, long-sleeved coat of many colors. If you know one thing about our family, you know about that coat, right?

Well, the rest of my brothers hated seeing Joseph prancing around in it. But it was more than just the coat. Joseph claimed to have these crazy dreams about the rest of us bowing down – bowing down! – before him.

The brothers just wanted to MAKE IT STOP. They thought of all sorts of wild schemes but ended up selling Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to a caravan en route to Egypt.

But not before stripping him of that coat and smearing it with the blood of a goat, thus solving two problems – getting rid of Joseph once and for all without actually having to kill him. They told father Jacob there'd been a tragic accident. (*Boo-hoo.*)

Fast forward several years. We've all muddled through back home. But Joseph in Egypt? He's had his ups and downs, but ended up making quite a life for himself. And believe it or not, it's the crazy dreams again – this time interpreting *other* peoples' dreams, especially those of Pharaoh. Pharaoh likes what he hears and appoints Joseph as his right-hand man.

You see, Pharaoh had a dream that came to pass exactly as Joseph predicted. After some flush years, the land is experiencing a famine. But thanks to Joseph, Egypt is prepared; they've been stockpiling grain for the lean years. To the extent that even folks from foreign lands travel to Egypt for relief.

And that's where today's vignette opens. The older brothers have showed up in Egypt asking for food. They're pretty much bowing down before Joseph -- just as he said back when we were kids! But Joseph's such a big shot they don't recognize him.

Then he blows his cover. "I am Joseph," he tells them.

You know, “your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt” – giving them every possible clue.

I wonder why he did that?

Was he happy to see them?

Eager to lord it over them that he’d survived, even thrived?

Did he know deep in his heart that they had some unfinished business with each other?

Families are complicated. Not just mine but yours too.

All families are complicated. Human relationships, complicated.

The tidy speech given by Joseph in today’s passage is not the end of the story.

It’s not a simple, happy ending.

The story continues for five more frankly convoluted chapters.

The truth is, everyone in this story has a lot more work to do, a lot more to learn.

The brothers need to come to terms with their deceit and duplicity, their jealousy of Joseph.

Our father Jacob needs to come to terms with the tragic repercussions of playing favorites among his own children.

Joseph needs to come to terms with his arrogance and self-importance.

Because none of this is of God.

God Almighty is not arrogant –

but humbles Godself to care about the likes of us humans.

As you Christians believe, God humbled Godself to take human form as a servant of all.

God doesn’t play favorites.

Each of God’s children is beloved and precious in God’s eyes.

And God is not duplicitous.

God’s will for us on God’s green earth is actually quite straightforward.

“It is good,” God says, repeatedly, at the beginning of Genesis.

It is all intended to be “good”.

So Joseph and Jacob and the brothers have a ways yet to go.

They each need to be brutally honest with themselves about their role in this mess.

They need to muster forgiveness – even though they know they've been wronged.

They need to seek forgiveness – from each other and themselves.

Most of all, they need to humbly confess and ask forgiveness of God – who has already forgiven them, and us too.

I don't believe for one moment that God willed any of this conflict and heart-ache.

God didn't "will" Joseph to be given up for dead or anyone to go hungry.

This was all the result of human will, human choices, human sin.

But I do believe God is merciful.

I do believe God is love,

and creative enough to work through whatever stupid mess we conjure.

And I believe that God's dream is for us to be reconciled to God and the whole family of humanity.

I'm not pretending this is easy.

My family story shows it's not easy. But it *is* possible.

With God's help, forgiveness and reconciliation are not only possible but have the grace to heal us.

It's been a long journey

but one worth taking to share this with you.

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