

Selections from Genesis 37

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream that I dreamed. There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.’ His brothers said to him, ‘Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?’ So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. So Israel said to him, ‘Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me.’ So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, ‘Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.’

Then Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.’ And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Sermon

I guess you can’t really blame Joseph’s brothers for not really enjoying being around him. It’s tough to be a sibling to your parent’s favorite, after all. It’s tough to not be the center of attention and not get special



treatment, especially when you see someone else getting all the gifts that you would like to receive.

And Joseph doesn't make it any easier on his brothers either. When he comes to them with the story of this dream, where they all have to bow down before him. And this thinly veiled metaphor he's got of sheaves of wheat doesn't really do anything to cover up his pride in being in the hero of the story.

But, still, it's pretty impressive, the extremes that those brothers are willing to go to in order to stop Joseph's dream from becoming a reality. They make a plan to kill him after all. And believe me, I know how tough it can be to have siblings that you have to compete with, but when they decide not to kill him, they only do it because they think they can make a quick buck by selling him to some traders who happen to be passing by. Yikes! That seems like a lot more than a little jealousy and your average sibling rivalry, doesn't it?

And I really do think that there's something more going on here. Because it's not their father's favoritism, or even the fancy coat that Joseph gets that really sets them off. No, it's not until he tells them about the dream, that they really kick their plans into high gear and start searching out a pit to throw him in. The scripture tells us that it was because of his dream that "they began to hate him even more."



A dream is an odd thing, isn't it? Dreams can unsettle us and make us nervous.

Have you ever woken up from a dream, a little unsure about what is "real life" and what is the dream? They make our world a little less stable than it was before we went to sleep. They awaken new possibilities and new uncertainties. They can shift the ground beneath our feet and make us a little less sure of ourselves.

And nobody likes that kind of feeling.

So, often, without even knowing it, we choose to keep a safe distance from the dreamers of our world. Because it's more comfortable here, on the solid ground of the status quo and the world that we know. And sometimes, without really even being aware that this is what we're doing, we try to put up roadblocks in the way of those dreamers. We try to cut them off from all that uncertainty that the dream might usher in. We try to hold them back from realizing that new world, that we don't yet fully understand - even when that new and uncertain world is a gift that God is trying to share with us.

Unfortunately, I think it's more natural for us to become the people who stand in the way of making God's dreams a reality than it is for us to be the ones who dream.

- Sometimes, we don't even listen to the dream, before we reply, "We've never done it *that* way."
- Or we assume that someone is too old, or too young, too different than ourselves to have anything to offer that *we* might need.
- Even Joseph almost stands in the way of the dream, when he makes it all about himself. When he fails to invite others in to share in the work or share in the glory. And sometimes we do that with our own dreams too. We make them too much about ourselves and leave the ways God wishes to use them to bless our siblings too.
- Or sometimes we're like Joseph's brothers, when we fear that the dreams God gives to others, might not let us be the heroes, so we scoff and stand in their way.

But, if the dream truly comes from God, then it will be good for all those that God loves. It will be good for the dreamer, and it will be good for those who fear the dream as well. Because when God moves the world forward, God doesn't want to leave anyone behind, but calls us to move together, toward a world of greater justice, peace, and blessing.

- Because even those brothers who sold Joseph off to slavery, found God's abundant blessing, when they made that dream come true. When they kneeled before Joseph in the store-houses of Egypt, without even knowing who he was, God was saving them from the years of hunger and famine that surrounded the house of their father. God was providing for them from the great abundance of this new uncertain world.

So when we see the dreamers coming, instead of making fun of them, or making plans to shut their dreams down. Let us lean in close. Let us not try to run away from or stand in the way of

the New World that God might be opening our eyes to through their dream. But, let us listen. Let us strive to hear. Let us work together, to make God's dreams for us a reality. So that the world can grow into something better than it has been. So our life together can get a bit more fair, more peaceful, healthier, more abundant. And we can all benefit together. And celebrate the One who gives the dreams. Amen.



This sermon was first shared with Aurora First Presbyterian Church, by Rev. Doug Friesema. To receive future communications from the church, please contact:

firstauroraoffice@gmail.com

(303) 364-2609

1585 Kingston St.
Aurora, CO 80010

Aurorafpchurch.com
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