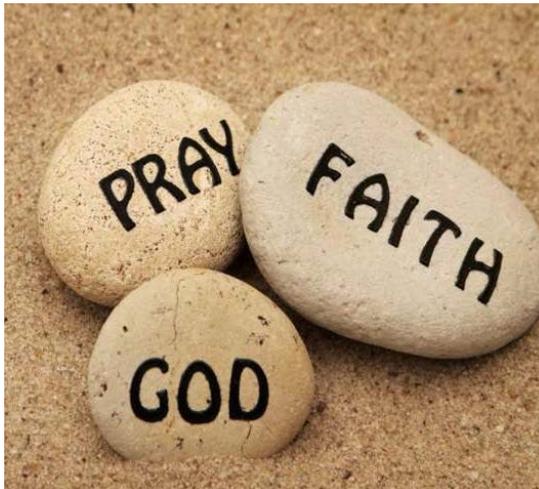


SEP 27 2020 ... START HERE ...



Prepare for our time together from afar

- Find a quiet and comfortable space
- Turn on some soothing instrumental music, maybe with headphones
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle
- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

TIME FOR THE ANCIENT STORY

Read silently or aloud – let these ancient words tap into your imagination.

Here's the backstory for today's story :

So, we left off last week with Abram trusting God's promises. Somewhere along the line, Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Issac, with two different women – one a slave, Hagar, the other his wife, Sarah. Abraham favored Issac, the son of his wife, and sent Ishmael and Hagar away.

Isaac and his wife Rebekah also had two sons, Esau and Jacob, twins!. Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. Jacob played some dirty tricks on the Isaac and Esau, before running for his life. (Rebekah played a big part in that too, by the way!)

Now, Jacob has 12 sons and one daughter (at least) with two wives and two slaves. Only one of these women did Jacob truly love, Rachel. One of those sons is Joseph, Rachel's firstborn – and so Joseph was Jacob's favorite.

Do you see a pattern here? Now for the ancient story ...

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob had made for him a long robe. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him and couldn't even talk nicely to him.

Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers, which made them hate him even more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had. When we were binding stalks of grain in the field, my stalk got up and stood upright, while your stalks gathered around it and bowed down to my stalk."

His brothers said to him, "Will you really be our king and rule over us?" So they hated him even more because of the dreams he told them.

[time passes]

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

They saw Joseph in the distance before he got close to them, and they plotted to kill him. The brothers said to each other, "Here comes the big dreamer. Come on now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns, and we'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams!"

When Reuben heard what they said, he saved him from them, telling them, "Let's not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Don't spill his blood! Throw him into this desert cistern, but don't lay a hand on him." He intended to save Joseph from them and take him back to his father.

Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and hide his blood? Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. Let's not harm him because he's our brother; he's family." His brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the cistern and found that Joseph wasn't in it, he tore his clothes. Then he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy's gone! And I—where can I go now?"

His brothers took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the long robe, brought it to their father, and said, "We found this. See if it's your son's robe or not."

He recognized it and said, "It's my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him. Joseph must have been torn to pieces!" Then Jacob tore his clothes, put a simple mourning cloth around his waist, and mourned for his son for many days. All of his sons and daughters got up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, telling them, "I'll go to my grave mourning for my son." And Joseph's father wept for him.

[a lot of time passes]

When Joseph's brothers realized that their father was now dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us, and wants to pay us back seriously for all of the terrible things we did to him?" So they approached Joseph and said, "Your father gave orders before he died, telling us, 'This is what you should say to Joseph. "Please, forgive your brothers' sins and misdeeds, for they did terrible things to you. Now, please forgive the sins of the servants of your father's God."'" Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

His brothers wept[Ⓜ] too, fell down in front of him, and said, "We're here as your slaves."

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I God? You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in order to save the lives of many people, just as he's doing today. Now, don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children." So he put them at ease and spoke reassuringly to them.

You might want to read the whole story, chapters 37 – 50 to really understand what Joseph went through and how he and his family reunited ...

- Genesis 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34 and 50:15-21 CEB

SO WHAT NOW?

Read silently or aloud – some thoughts on this story

Like the Star Wars saga, or Percy Jackson, or the Hunger Games or the Marvel or DC Universes or any other story that keeps adding new characters and going on for ever ... the stories in Genesis do the same thing. And, just like the characters in these long stories on the movie screen, the mistakes and selfish choices that some of the early characters make have a huge impact on the later characters.

Like families that make mistakes. Mistakes like choosing favorites.

Sometimes those favorites are an aunt or a cousin. Or a favorite grandparent. Perhaps a favorite ends up being a child when there are other kids in the family – especially if there are step-siblings or half-siblings. What a hot mess these kids will have on their hands when they grow up.

That's what has happened in Genesis.

Abraham favored Isaac over Ishmael – and kicked Ishmael and his slave-mom out. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob – Esau was older. Jacob played some tricks that cost Esau dearly and ended up running for his life.

Now, Jacob has two wives – Leah and Rachel and their two slave women. Rachel is the one Jacob loves. So, Jacob favors her first born son, Joseph. And the other eleven boys from the other three moms? Oh. You better believe they KNEW Joseph was the favorite. They knew because Jacob didn't bother hiding it. And I'll bet their three moms made sure the boys knew Rachel was the favorite too.

What a hot mess.

Have you experienced being the favorite or NOT being the favorite? Either way, it's not always fun. Either you are lonely and left out of everything or you are lonely and left out of everything. Not at all what God wanted or wants.

Maybe Joseph was lonely and that's why he told his brothers about the dreams. Maybe he was just immature. Either way, he poured gasoline on the fire that led his brothers to try to kill him. The oldest of the twelve, Reuben, somehow managed to get the rest of the young men to back off – and Joseph gets sold off as a slave and carted off to Egypt.

What we don't see in between this movie clip and the next is the many years that forced Joseph to grow up.

He gets accused of rape by his slave master's wife when she came on to him and he refused her. He gets thrown in jail. He gets forgotten. Yet, God is with him every step of the way.

Eventually, Joseph has learned and listened to God and is able to interpret dreams. He interprets some in the jail – and that drops him (after two long years) in front of the king of Egypt. Joseph interprets some dreams that the king has – and boom. The king puts Joseph in charge of almost everything – to save Egypt from a bad famine that is coming. If you are not sure what a famine is, it's when no food can grow for awhile and people tend to starve when there's no food growing. So, this is a bad deal. And the famine was not just happening in Egypt – it happened where Jacob and the boys were too.

So – after a while, the boys come to Egypt begging for food and they don't recognize Joseph. Joseph sends them back for their father. They are all reunited, and all is well and hunky dory.

Except Jacob dies, right before our last part of the story. And once he's gone, what will Joseph do?

What would you have done?

Sometimes us pastors take the easy way out and tell youth that this example of Joseph forgiving his brothers means you should always forgive and forget and give each other a hug and be best friends again.

I call boloney.

I've been there. I know it's not like that. Joseph had a lot of power and didn't really stand to lose anything if he forgave. But when someone has really hurt you and they have power over you, or they keep hurting you – forgiveness is super hard. And – God knows that.

Forgiving is not about wiping the slate clean as if the hurt never happened. Forgiving is not about saying that the person who hurt you was right. Forgiving is not saying, “do it again, it's ok.”

Forgiving is about us deciding not to take revenge on the person or persons that hurt us.

Forgiveness is about us deciding to let God make something good out of what happened.

Forgiveness is about us finding peace for ourselves.

And sometimes that means we can't be in that relationship anymore. Sometimes it means we have to declare healthy boundaries. Sometimes it means we have to keep forgiving over and over – it's not always a one time thing.

Did you notice that God does not make an appearance in this part of the story? In the chapters in between, we learn that God was with Joseph, always. Perhaps that is the good news from this tricky scene.

Even when we can't forgive – even when we won't forgive – even when we don't want to be forgiven – God is with us.

Maybe that's all we need for today.

CHAT WITH GOD TIME

Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper.

Hey God, what is up with Jacob playing favorites?
Don't You love everyone the same? No matter what?

And what's up with those weird dreams Joseph had?
Should he have kept his mouth shut? Would that have helped?

How bad was it, God, with Joseph's brothers?
It is hard to believe they really wanted to kill him.

But, God, the hardest thing about this story
Is the tiny part of me wondering

What is up with forgiving them?
And do you want me to forgive too?

That will be really hard, God
So please help me – even if I can't forgive.

May it be so.

LET YOUR SOUL RESPOND

As you wish, choose a theme, and participate in a response to the story and the message.



UNFAIRNESS

Practice awareness

- Do you experience people playing favorites with others?
- Are you the favorite? In your family, in class, at work?

What other ways do people place one person above another?



FAMILY

Practice reflection

- Do you have a family (by birth or choice) favorite? Do others?
- How does fairness play out in your family?

What family “ways” would you like to change?



HEALING

Practice wisdom

- What does it take for you to forgive someone?
- How do you go about healing from horrible experiences?

What does reaching out to someone who has hurt you look like?

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR MIND RESPOND

Choose a “thought & question” pair to think about. You can do one or as many as you’d like.

1. God kinda disappears in this story. *How do you think God exists in moments of unfairness like Joseph experienced? What do you think God might be feeling or thinking?*
2. Three generations of favoritism set up today’s story. *What can we do to heal generations of family mistakes? What if we have helped make those mistakes?*
3. Joseph chooses to forgive his brothers and take care of them. *What if we aren’t ready to forgive? What if we forgive but protect ourselves by not being in a relationship with someone who has hurt us? Do you think Joseph having a lot of power had anything to do with his choice?*

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR BODY RESPOND

What will you do with this experience?

Choose an action (or more) to act on what you've learned ...

- Write a poem about something unfair that happened to you.
- Choose something that is unfair in your world and research how you might try to change it.
- Draw a picture of all the people that treat you fairly.
- Choose a playlist that reflects your feelings about your family – by birth or chosen.
- Make something while you consider forgiving someone who has hurt you.

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

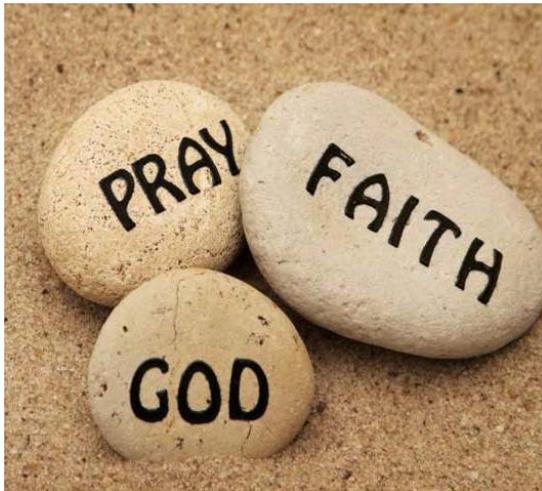
- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

END HERE ...



Prepare for our return to our daily lives

- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK! PASTOR CRISTINE

ONLINE RESPONSE OPTIONS

How will you share this experience with our youth group?

If you would like to share your responses online with our youth and leaders, make sure you are part of our MVCC Youth Google Group.

Email Pastor Cristine at youth@montevista.org for more information.