

The Dreamer

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 10th Sunday after Pentecost, August 8, 1993. Scripture Lesson: Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Christians as well as non Christians experience conflict in their families. It tears some families apart. There's no perfect family. Some people get so discouraged when they discover that their family isn't perfect that they ~~feel~~ ^{Feel} ~~discouraged and~~ hopeless and, sometimes, even give up on their families. Some can see only what's wrong in their family. They may even have some uneasiness when they come to church and see other people gathering as a family to sit in the pews of the church. They think, "Maybe other people see the obvious things that are wrong in my family." One of the reasons I love to read the Bible is because it portrays families like ours where we see many things that are obviously wrong. Nevertheless, God uses these families to bring blessing to the world.

Joseph's family is one of those. Joseph was born into a family in which his father not only had Joseph's mother for a wife, but he had three other wives as well, and they all lived together. Joseph's family was not perfect. Like many families today, Joseph's family was divided by the sins of favoritism and jealousy which almost led to the sin of murder.

1. First, there was the sin of favoritism. Old Jacob loved Joseph, the son of his beloved Rachel, more than any other of his children. The old man took pleasure in making his favorite child a coat. The KJV of the Bible calls it a "coat of many colors". That translation is based on an ancient Greek version of Genesis. The literal translation of the original Hebrew is, "a coat that reaches the extremities". Modern

versions call it a "long robe with sleeves". It was the kind of coat that was given to aristocracy. Privileged people who were exempt from hard labor wore this kind of coat(Ogilvie). Colored or long, the coat did nothing but incite jealousy and hostility on the part of Joseph's brothers.

The story reminds me of a man I know. He remembers what it was like to be a younger child like Joseph. His older sister did everything better than he did. She got better grades. She was a better athlete. She was better looking. And yet, he said, "the recurring confidence in my life was the assurance from my father that he loved us equally." He went on to say, "I remember when she grew to an age where my parents gave her a ring, a sapphire ring, at some sacrifice. I watched that ring very carefully, and tried to evaluate a sapphire. But being totally unfamiliar with jewelry, I had to inquire. I called my father confidentially. 'How much did that ring for Lynn cost?' I asked him. 'Well, you know Lynn is coming to be quite a young lady now; and she's gotten to the age where she needs a ring,' he said. 'I know all that,' I replied. 'How much did it cost?'" This was during the Depression. His father answered, "One hundred and fifty dollars." "I'll expect a check in the morning," the man replied. He got the check in the morning, because his father understood there would be no way to explain to his son that she was *not* favored if she received something her brother did not receive (Haden, *Favoritism*, 1989).

Favoritism isn't confined to our families. It's found in the government, in the workplace, in our schools and churches. When we see somebody benefiting from favoritism we get angry. Favoritism, as the story of Joseph shows us, is at the root of many more serious problems. In the NT we're repeatedly told, "Do not show

partiality.” I try very hard not to show partiality. I’m sure I fail. Just ask my kids. I like to think of each of my three boys as an only child. Each of them is unique. Each is special. Each is irreplaceable. Each is one of a kind. I want to treat each of them as an only child. Sometimes the hardest thing for child to share is a parent.

Jacob sinned seriously by showing Joseph favoritism. Are we showing favoritism to one of our children; to an employees; to people who are like us? Favoritism in the United States is at the root of a lot of our evils.

2. The favoritism that Jacob showed towards his son, Joseph, led, secondly to rivalry. Sibling rivalry is an uncomfortable, sometimes unpleasant, and almost always inevitable reality of living with more than one child. Brothers and sisters, from what I’ve observed, can sometimes be a real pain. Younger brothers or sisters have a habit of hanging around their older sisters or brothers to spy on them, and tattle. On the other hand, older siblings love to beat up on their younger brothers and sisters.

Why is there so much sibling rivalry? Sometimes, I guess, it’s to get parents’ attention. Sometimes it’s to exercise power and dominance. Sometimes it’s prompted out of jealousy and envy. Sometimes they’re simply imitating what they see their friends and parents doing. Sometimes it’s done out of boredom. And sometimes it’s just plain fun to irritate a brother or sister (*RAISING BROTHERS AND SISTERS Without Raising the Roof!*, Family Service, 1989).

Well, you can tell from the story of Joseph that sibling rivalry isn’t something new. Joseph’s brothers hated their younger brother. For one thing, Joseph was a tattle tale. “Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his

brothers... and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father." It's little wonder that Joseph's brothers "hated him and could not speak peaceably to him." I can understand those brothers. I hate ~~tattling~~ *being fattled on. I'm not about tattling though.*

Joseph also went around bragging about his dreams. Strange dreams have always been the source of conversation. We were at the dinner table one day last week and I was trying to get some sermon ideas from my family. I told them Joseph had a strange dream that he was a sheaf of wheat. "Have you ever had strange dreams?" I asked. One of my boys said, "I really had a strange dream last night. I dreamed I was a muffler on a car." I said, "~~You're kidding me.~~ *wow, that's really weird.*" He said, "~~no,~~ *yes,* I woke up really exhausted." Everybody at the table groaned.

The dreams Joseph told really made his brothers groan. He dreamed that he was a sheaf of wheat in a field and all the other sheaves of wheat were bowing down to him. Then he dreamed that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to him. If you have those kinds of dreams it wise not to share them with older brothers and sisters. The father and the brothers saw plainly the significance of these dreams. "Shalt thou indeed reign over us?" cried his older brothers, and they hated him.

3. So the favoritism Joseph received along with his tattling and dreams led to greater and greater sibling rivalry and hatred.[↑] *That can happen so easily in our families.* One day, when his brothers saw Joseph coming to them in the fields, 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."

Stop and think about that. Isn't it true that the source of a lot of the violence and killing and bloodshed in the United States can be traced to characteristics that were present in the family of Joseph: favoritism^{favoritism}; on the basis of race or sex or social status or cronyism; and rivalry, gang rivalry, class rivalry, ^{or religion} ~~which~~ ^{so easily} escalates to murderous proportions?

Have you ever been so angry with someone that you wished they were dead? I was listening to a radio talk show last week. Listeners were encouraged to call in response to the question, "Have you ever considered murdering someone?" Nearly all those who called in said that the thought of murder had crossed their minds, if only briefly, at least once in their life. Sometimes it was a teacher, a fellow worker, a parent, a child and very often a little brother or sister. Fortunately, none of the callers had ever acted on their murderous impulses. But it did show how rampant feelings are that can lead to violence and murder. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is worth nothing if it doesn't overcome favoritism and lead rivals to seek reconciliation.

The story of Joseph which will be completed next week contains good news is that God can overcome the evils brought about by favoritism, envy, jealousy and hatred. God used the anger and hatred of Joseph's brothers to bring about their eventual salvation. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. There he rose to a position of great authority, second only to the Pharaoh. In a time of famine, Joseph's family came to Egypt for food. Joseph recognized them, forgave them and saved them.

This story illustrates how important it is for families in conflict to seek

reconciliation before it's too late. Jesus said, "if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gifts before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." He was acknowledging the conflicts that often divide families and churches, and was emphasizing the need to seek reconciliation. Is there someone who has something against you? Seek reconciliation before the conflict grows deeper.

Finally, Joseph is a type of Christ long before Jesus was born. Jesus, like Joseph, was betrayed into the hands of sinful men by members of his own spiritual family. But God's hand guided those events, just as God was guiding the events surrounding the life of Joseph. God used the wrath of Jesus' enemies to bring about their salvation. Just as God raised Joseph from slavery to be a Lord in Egypt, God raised up Jesus from death and made him Lord of the universe. The risen Christ wants to be our Lord as well. He wants to be your Lord and my Lord. He wants his Word and Law to have ultimate authority in our lives. Just as Joseph was able to save his family, only Christ can save us from our sin, from ourselves and from the power of death and hell.

Let us pray: Lord, deliver us from our sin of favoritism, envy, jealousy and hatred. Give us your Spirit to seek reconciliation with those we hate and distrust. Enable us and our families to be a blessing to the church and the world. Thank you for your providence which is able to overcome our sin and resistance and bring about our salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.