**August 9, 2020 Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28**

***For Every Action***

**Scripture:**

*(1)Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. (2)This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. (3)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. (4)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. … (12)Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. (13)And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." (14)So he 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. He came to Shechem, (15)and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" (16)"I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." (17)The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. (18)They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. (19)They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. (20)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." (21)But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." (22)Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"--that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. (23)So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; (24)and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. (25)Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. (26)Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? (27)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. (28)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.*

Genesis 37:1-28 NRSV

**Notes:**

1. ***Actions*** develop consequences that far outlive those who initiated them.
   1. For every action there is a ***reaction***.
   2. Jacob clutched Rachel’s ***memory*** in Joseph and Benjamin.
   3. Joseph was chosen as his ***favorite***.
   4. Joseph is ***given*** a supervisory position in the business.
   5. Jacob ***gifted*** Joseph with a beautiful coat,
   6. This coat made it clear, who had ***father’s*** ***ear***.
2. Joseph’s unfair ***behavior***, was bound to have a ripple effect.
   1. ***Joseph*** was meant to be in charge.
   2. this was a situation of ***injustice***.
   3. The ***brothers*** plot to kill Joseph .
   4. Reuben convinces his ***brothers*** to sell Joseph.
   5. Jacob’s ***grief*** nearly cripples him, ***devastated*** by the loss.
3. We live with the ***consequence*** of our action and others actions.
   1. We always have a ***choice*** how we respond to situations.
   2. Without ***forgiveness***, there is no future.”
   3. Pain can be avoided if we answer injustice with ***forgiveness*** and ***love***?
   4. React with ***love***, patience, ***forgiveness***, and peace.
   5. We can be the ***change*** that we want to see in this world.

**Script:**

It has been four years since I retired from teaching, I do not miss the drive down to Cumberland. But I do miss the people I worked with and the students I taught. One of the lessons I enjoyed teaching dealt with Newton's laws of Motion, *“A Body at rest tends to stay at rest, a Body in motion tends to stay in motion. The relationship between a body’s mass acceleration and applied force is F=MA. And, For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.”* I learned this for the first time in Dr. Popp’s Physics class, it was reinforced in college, and ended up being something I used quite often

But the third law is something that also applies to human nature and relationships. When we are told to do something and we do not want to. We often respond with an equal and opposite reaction. An attitude of defiance and refusal. The thing is, our actions have rewards and consequences. Our reactions have even more rewards and consequences; Some which far outlive our time in this world.

Today we are looking at the story of Joseph in Genesis 37:1-4 and 12-28. In this story we will be able to see how our actions have these rewards and consequences; how our actions often cause others to react in an equal and opposite direction; and, how sometimes these actions and reactions will lead to life changing situations, some that are rewarding, but more often than not, some that are negative consequences, and some consequences that far outlive us. Join me as we share in the reading of our sermon passage today from Genesis 37 1-4 and 12-28

*(1)Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. (2)This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. (3)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. (4)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. … (12)Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. (13)And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." (14)So he 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. He came to Shechem, (15)and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" (16)"I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." (17)The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. (18)They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. (19)They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. (20)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." (21)But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." (22)Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"--that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. (23)So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; (24)and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. (25)Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. (26)Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? (27)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. (28)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. Genesis 37:1-28 NRSV

The actions of some people bear consequences that far outlive those who initiated them. Jacob is the third generation of Abraham's Descendants; God’s chosen people. and we’re starting to see the effects of some seriously misinformed choices, reactions that buckle under the weight of bad decisions and ripple out over and over again, over generations, even. We crack open our story today to Genesis chapter 37, which, most scholars will tell you begins a whole new part of this sweeping epic; up until this point our text has been little stories of the bigger story of God. But chapter 37 begins a long, drawn-out narrative that spans nearly ten chapters, it tells the story of how this ragtag little band of Abraham’s descendants, finds itself planted in the land of Egypt, and eventually is forced into slavery.

The tie between the stories of Abraham and this story of Joseph is our character Jacob. In previous verses Jacob sends his family across the Jabbok River ahead of him because he was scared of what his angry brother Esau might do to him. What are we to do with this turn of events? Well, aside from shaking our heads in disbelief at the antics of our ancestors of faith, we can read this story … and take some comfort. For those of us who think our families are dysfunctional, well, these families make yours and mine look rather normal, if not downright boring.

Think about the wild ride they’ve all been on: Abram claimed that his wife Sarah was his sister, because he could tell the king of Egypt was interested in her, and Abraham was scared he’d be killed. *Nice*. Sarah herself wasn’t much better. She convinced Abraham to have a child with her slave, Hagar, then tried to kill both Hagar and the child when she got jealous. Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac on an altar. Isaac and his wife Rebekah raised two sons Esau and Jacob, who had a sibling rivalry that went far beyond fighting over their toys; it was really a matter of life and death. Jacob ran to his Uncle Laban, who lied to him and tricked him out of marrying his true love, Rachel on his wedding day, no less. And then Jacob ended a 20-year estrangement from his birth family, having pulled up the roots he’d planted with Laban and sending his family out ahead of him. Whew! Sounds like a whole *season* of daytime shock in those chapters of the book of Genesis. But even with the start to a new chapter in the narrative, I’m afraid the drama is not over yet. Dysfunction breeds dysfunction and for every action there is a reaction, so once Jacob gets settled and starts raising his own kids, it’s not surprising that they have some issues, too.

Jacob is already well up in years when chapter 37 opens. Remember, Jacob had two wives and two servant women, concubines. Leah, the first wife whom Jacob was tricked into marrying, was the mother of six boys. Rachel, Leah’s sister and Jacob’s favorite wife, was the mother of two boys. The two concubines were mothers of four boys together, the total sons of Jacob at this time was 12. Twelve sons. Not bad for somebody who started out with nothing, hoping to establish a great nation through his descendants. We already know that Jacob loved Rachel above all of the other mothers of his children, but Rachel had died while giving birth to her youngest son, Benjamin. So Jacob was left grieving and clutching tightly to her memory through the affections of the two boys she’d birthed: Joseph and Benjamin. This dysfunctional favoritism, unresolved grief or whatever it was Jacob was dealing with, well, it had a way of rippling down into his relationships with his children and, as a result, their relationships with each other; and that is exactly what today’s story is all about.

Joseph was number 11 out of 12 sons of Jacob, and he specifically chose him as his favorite. As one of four children myself, I know how it feels to be certain your parents have a favorite and it’s not you. Turns out all my siblings were equally aware about our parents having favorites, but we all thought the favorite was someone else and not us! But if we study the Hebrew text carefully Joseph was by far the favored child of Jacob. We’re told that Joseph had been given to a supervisory position in the family business, responsible for reporting back on the activities of his brothers, who were busy managing Jacob’s herds and herds of flocks. That is right, Joseph is the designated tattletale, the snitch, the golden child. The text tells us that Joseph was17 years old when the story begins and, the 11th out of 12, so you might imagine the emotions when Joseph ran home to Daddy; tattling that his older brothers were taking extra long lunch breaks!

And then there was the coat, we’re told that Jacob had gifted Joseph with a beautiful coat, a “coat of many colors” or a “long-sleeved coat.” It was “a coat with special markings” or “a coat with long stripes.” The particular Hebrew word for “coat” here is used only one other time in the Hebrew text. In 2 Samuel, we learn that Tamar, daughter of King David, wore a special royal garment. We have to know that Joseph’s coat was not just any coat, that’s for sure. When he wore this coat it was clear who had his father's ear and who didn’t. When Joseph would come down to the fields wearing his colorful coat, his brothers' drab clothes paled in comparison, and would mark them as less important. It was like wearing a McDonald’s uniform versus a finely tailored suit. Everyone who saw them next to each other would definitely know who was esteemed. Day after day, Joseph would come to the fields and strut up and down, his beautiful coat swinging easily around his ankles. And he would hurry back to his father Jacob and report any indiscretions he observed, any questionable behavior he saw in his brothers. Ooooh, it was not nice. There he was every day, gloating on the sidelines, while his brothers did the hard work and tried to keep their burning anger in check.

Remember, if there’s anything we learn from this story it is that every action has a reaction, and Joseph’s ridiculously unfair behavior, totally encouraged by his father Jacob, was bound to have a ripple effect. And, it did. Boy, did it ever. The straw that broke the camel’s back, as it were, one day Joseph strolled down to the fields where his brothers were working and proceeded to tell them about some dreams he had had. Remember what they were? dreams about all the brothers out in the fields, binding sheaves of wheat, when suddenly all the brothers’ sheaves bowed down to Joseph’s. And another dream, about the sun, the moon and 11 stars, all bowing down to Joseph. Joseph managed to report his dreams to his brothers with a straight face; totally serious, and the meaning of the dreams was obvious to Joseph, he was meant to be in charge, to lord it over all of them. The meaning of the dreams was obvious to Joseph’s brothers, too, and they were sick of it; sick of Jacob’s favoritism, sick of feeling second best, sick of Joseph’s arrogance, just sick of the whole situation.

I don’t think any of us would dispute the fact that this was a situation of injustice. Jacob perpetuated the dysfunction of his own childhood by repeating it with his sons, the brothers could easily read the writing on the wall. There was no future for them as leaders of the family; even though he did not deserve to have it, Joseph was Jacob’s chosen child, the apple of Jacob’s eye, his favorite. And as a result, all the other brothers’ status were bumped down a notch, they were losing out, unfairly, because of the way Jacob was behaving. And Joseph’s gloating, whether intentional or not, was not helping matters in the least. It’s one thing to be the adored baby of the family; but it’s another thing altogether to use your special status to oppress other people.

And so do you know what happened? The brothers plot to kill Joseph out there in the field one day; just do away with him and his silly dreams once and for all. Their plan was to kill him and throw his body into a pit. But somebody’s conscience got the better of him—the NRSV says it was Reuben— and Reuben convinces his brothers to sell Joseph to a passing caravan, sell him off and get him far, far away and out of their hair forever. And, they staged the whole thing. They killed an animal and smeared that beautiful coat with blood, then they took it back to their father, who made the assumption that Joseph was dead. And Jacob’s grief nearly cripples him, he is so devastated by the loss. Then, life continues, as it always does even in the face of tragedy and violence and pain, with the injustice perpetrated against the brothers seemingly avenged. But every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and you’d better believe the brothers’ behavior had consequences. This is where I want to stop to think about what it is we might learn about ourselves and God as we read this story.

Curiously, God is not a figure in this story at all. We’ve come from epic sagas where God is appearing in all manner of ways, to this story, where God never appears. All we have are the actions and reactions of human beings, trying to live in community, in family, with each other, and not doing well at. Every action has a reaction, and we’re stuck, living with the consequences of our actions and the actions of others.

It was unjust and unfair, it’s true, Joseph’s brothers did not deserve the treatment they were receiving from Joseph and they deserved far better from their father, Jacob. but they made a choice to address injustice with another act of injustice, of violence, even, and Newton’s third law of motion swung into effect, as we know by now it always does. When we are faced with injustice, as Joseph’s brothers were, we have a choice about how to respond. And remember, every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

Simon Wiesenthal was a Jew who lived during World War II in Europe. During the war he was forced to live in a ghetto and then sent to a work camp, where he faced the possibility of death every day. One day in the work camp, Wiesenthal was brought by a nurse to hear the dying confessions of an SS Nazi soldier. The soldier asked for forgiveness for the things he had done to the Jewish people; he wanted forgiveness as he was dying, he was afraid that his soul would not be able to rest in eternity unless he was forgiven. In his book The Sunflower Wiesenthal tells the story about trying over and over to leave the room because he was so afraid and because he hated Nazis. But he stayed and listened to the dying man out of pity and also because the soldier begged him not to leave. Wiesenthal recognized that the Nazi soldier was showing true repentance, but he also knew that the soldier was ignorant, selfish, and a member of the group that had taken away the lives of his friends and family. Overwhelmed with the heaviness of the decision, Wiesenthal eventually just left the room. The next day he found out that the soldier had died and left all his things to Wiesenthal; Wiesenthal spent the rest of his life asking the question: “What would you have done?”

Most people will agree that Wiesenthal could not have forgiven that solider on behalf of an entire race of people, but many also note: there’s something powerful in stopping violence and hatred with forgiveness and love. Desmond Tutu, writes of Wiesenthal’s dilemma: “It’s clear that if we look only toward a retributive justice, we might as well close up shop. Forgiveness is not some nebulous thing. It is practical politics. Without forgiveness, there is no future.”

Sometimes in life, things happen to us that we can’t control. Sometimes we set out, like to marry Rachel and end up married to Leah. But even when these things happen, we always—always—have a choice; we have a choice about how we will respond to the situations in which we find ourselves.

We can respond to the injustice we face with anger and hatred and violence, and maybe some would say a response like that is even justified. But remember: every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and violence and pain and injustice always breed more violence, pain and injustice. What pain could have been avoided if Joseph’s brothers were able to face the unjust situation they found themselves in and respond, not with violence, but with forgiveness? What pain could we avoid if we were to answer injustice with forgiveness and love?

Every action, you know, has an equal and opposite reaction, and I suspect what would happen when violence and injustice is countered with forgiveness and love, might even be something akin to what happened when Jesus stepped toward the boat through the churning storm. When he reached out his hand through the whipping wind and utter chaos, and said, “peace, be still.” And it was.

We are living in troubling times. We have the option of looking at the situations in this world; the COVID 19 virus; the tragic death of people at the hands of law enforcement; the “peaceful” protests of Black Lives Matters. The politicization of these events in our government in order to divide and separate; in order to advance a political party’s agenda. The ridiculous ways that people are complaining of these situations in our world

Our option is to act just like the people that we see and agree with; Or we can react with love, patience, forgiveness, and peace. We can forgive those who wrong us; we can be the voice of reason in chaos, we can be the peacemakers, we can give hope to the hopeless, we can give help to the helpless. We can feed the hungry, we can house the homeless, and we can be the change that we want to see in this world; until Jesus returns to take us home to be with him