

“Dreams, Drama, and the Divine”

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

New Revised Standard Version

This sermon is presented in a series of character monologues beginning with an introduction in the voice of the preacher. It is filmed in Calvary's coat room, with different jackets hanging up that represent different characters; each jacket is worn during that character's monologue as indicated.

Introduction (*jean jacket*)

We may remember this story fondly because of Joseph's Technicolor Dreamcoat, but that cloak of favoritism wasn't all it was cracked up to be, was it?

And as it turns out, Joseph is not the only one in this family cloaked in a garment that doesn't do him any favors. His father, Jacob, Israel, is cloaked in prideful power. His brother, Reuben is cloaked in jealousy, selfishness. And Judah? He's cloaked in greed.

Everyone in this story is cloaked in something. Aren't we all?

In this family drama, we're reminded that so often we put on attitudes and dispositions and beliefs as if they are garments that we can take off and easily discard. But the longer we wear these garments of attitude and behavior and belief, the harder they are to remove. We may even start to believe they are our true skin, our true selves. But they're not.

We are born into the garment of God's belovedness, but it sure does seem like we spend our lives trying to cover that up, doesn't it? Or equally worse, trying to rip it off of others. Thanks be to God that God's belovedness is woven so deeply into the fabric of our soul that we can't cover it up and we can't rip it off others either, but boy we sure do come close sometimes.

Some of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors we cloak ourselves in, we do so unconsciously. Some cloaks are draped on us by others. Some we wrap ourselves up in like to

protect us from the world, and some we flaunt about in to project something out into the world.

So today I want us to look at what we're wearing. Because we might be bundled up in behaviors and attitudes that aren't serving us or worse, that might be harming others - without even realizing it.

Just like a really well-worn, comfortable jean jacket that goes with everything, sometimes the things we are most attached to, the things we always gravitate to and grab first, the things that are most comfortable for us and that we think look good on us – sometimes THOSE are the very things we need to take off.

(take off jean jacket)

But don't take it from me. Take it from this family. They know what it means to overhaul a wardrobe.

Israel/Jacob: *(doctoral robe)*

Back in my day they didn't have things like fancy academic degrees, but if they did, I would have gotten a PhD in ladder

climbing. I had figured out how to get whatever I wanted, no matter the cost.

I've been climbing this ladder for as long as I remember. Pulling myself up, pushing other people down. I'm a twin you know? My brother Esau was technically a split second older than me; as we came out of the womb I tried to grab his heel so that I could be the first born, but alas, didn't quite make it.

But no matter. I spent my childhood becoming a mamma's boy, and eventually used her favoritism to trick my dad into giving me the birthright and blessing. Poor Esau. He didn't see it coming. My dad didn't either. He was blind. It was easy to kill a couple goats and have mom make a tasty stew and put some animal fur on my arms – all so that dad would think I was Esau – he was the burly hunter...not me. In any case – it worked.

Now, truth be told, I did wrestle with my conscious about this – for many years. In fact, I wrestled God about it too...on the banks of the Jabbok River. I have a sore hip to prove it. And

I got a new name that day too. From then on I was no longer Jacob – *Yacov* – which means “*supplanter, holder of the heel, trickster, deceiver.*” My new name is Israel – *Yisrael* – “*one who struggles or strives with God.*” I wrestled with God, clearly. I also wrestled with my privilege and pride and power.

I mean, I worked my way to the top. I deserve all that I’ve got. And clearly I’m blessed because of it! I’ve got twelve sons. And plenty of women.

First there’s my wife Leah – my sons Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah are from her. Then her sister Rachel’s handmaiden Bilhah gave me the next two sons - Dan and Naphtali.

Then there’s Leah’s handmaid, Zilpah, she gave me Gad and Asher.

Then Leah gave me two more sons – Issachar and Zebulun.

Then Rachel, my favorite wife, she gave me my favorite sons – Joseph and Benjamin. I loved these two little guys the most, but if I HAD to pick a favorite it was Joseph. I know parents aren’t supposed to have

“favorites,” but don’t you have a “favorite”? You know, even just a little bit? The kid who behaves and helps out and makes life a little bit easier...the kid who doesn’t rebel? Of course I love all my kids, but man did I LOVE Joseph. He was like a mini-me. And so, he got all of me. All my attention. All my resources. All my hopes and dreams.

And I wanted HIM to know that and I wanted EVERYONE else to know it too - that MY kid was special. You know, how you dote on your Varsity Football Captains and Quarterbacks, your Marching Band Drum Majors, your Valedictorians? That’s how special Joseph was. Now, we didn’t have letter jackets like you do, so I had a special robe made for him.

It was a garment that signaled to the world that he was cut from the finest cloth and that people should listen to him and look up to him. Remember, we didn’t have department stores like you do. Every single piece of clothing was made by hand. It this robe made with the finest threads and fabrics, and now somehow y’all started calling it

the “coat of many colors” (something was lost in translation) but color was never the point. Don’t get me wrong – it’s got beautiful colors in it. But the colors didn’t make it special, the LONG sleeves did.

You know what long sleeves mean don’t you? And no, they don’t mean the Aspen leaves are turning or ski season is upon us or the Pumpkin Spice Latte is available at Starbucks, back in OUR day, long sleeves on a garment signified a higher class of people, “management” - NOT “day labor,” because you can’t work in the fields with long, flowing sleeves. Laborers wear practical garments. CEOs wear royal robes with long, flowing sleeves.¹

You know as I was having it commissioned, the garment maker asked me if I was afraid of what my other sons would think, you know the older ones. Technically, they should’ve been the ones in line to inherit the family business and all that I have, but this was my way of breaking it to them that it was

gonna be Joseph, not them. I knew they would probably be hurt. That wasn’t my intention. But back then, I mean, I just thought I could do whatever I wanted. It was such a privilege to be a man in the Bible. No one questioned anything we did or said. They called us Patriarchs. Don’t you all still have that today? Patriarchy I think it’s called...in any case, do you want to see it? Joseph’s coat?

(hold up ornate coat)

Beautiful isn’t it? One of a kind.

Joseph *(ornate coat)*

Why thank you! I do look fabulous, don’t I? Yeah, my dad gave it to me. Honestly, sometimes I start to think it’s a little much but then I’m like – “nah, I deserve it.”

I am the apple of my Dad’s eye. And why wouldn’t I be? I inform him of everything he needs to know about my brothers. Some call that being a snitch or a tattle-tale. I just call

¹ John H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pgs 662-63.

it being honest...it's the birthright of every youngest child. Or second-to-youngest in my case.

Anyway, back to my fabulous coat...this was clearly the ticket to my future and the ticket OUT of anything I didn't want to do...like sweat. It's way too hot outside to work in this coat. Plus, I needed to be inside where I could get my rest. I loved to sleep back then. When I slept, I dreamt. And I had really vivid dreams. You're in a pandemic now, right? You know they say dreams increase during times like that...stress, illness, anxiety, fever, and whatnot. Maybe you've had some vivid dreams. When I started dreaming, we actually weren't in a pandemic, or plague or famine – at least not yet.

But one of my early dreams was bazaar.



We were all in the fields – my brothers and I - binding sheaves of wheat and all the sudden the sheaves started moving. My sheaf rose and stood up right, and all my brothers' sheaves started coming towards mine and they bowed down to my sheaf. Heck yeah!

Now of course, I just had to tell my brothers about this...they were IN the dream after all.

But...I should have known it wouldn't go well. I mean, they already hated me. This definitely made it worse. But it's not like I said I was going to reign over them and they'd have to bow down to me. I didn't say that – THEY did.

By the way: the next night I had another dream – the sun, moon, and were bowing down to me too. I should have learned my lesson to keep my dreams to myself. But – I tend to run my mouth. I know, hard to believe. So I told them about that dream too.

BIG mistake.

Reuben (*rain coat*)

We all saw him coming.
Coming to “check on us,” little
tattle-tale or even worse,
coming to tell us another one of
his “dreams.”

As soon as we saw him we
huddled up to make a plan.
Now, I was always the prepared
one. I am the first-born after all,
the oldest...you know how we
are. Responsible. That’s why I
wear a rain coat. I mean, it’s
not the rainy season per se –
but I ALWAYS want to be
prepared...you never know
when a little rain shower will
pop up. Plus it’s got SPF
protection and it has lots of
pockets where I can stash
snacks and water if anyone
needs anything while we’re
working during the day.

I don’t know why my dad could
never see that I was the one that
held EVERYTHING together
in this family. But he never saw
it. All he saw was Joseph.
Darling, dreamy Joseph. Ugh.

Anyway as soon as we saw
Joseph coming we started
scheming and my brothers
jumped to the most extreme
option of course. They are so
impulsive. They never plan or
think through anything. They

wanted to kill him and throw
him in a pit but tell our dad that
a wild animal ate him. *“We’ll
see what comes of his dreams,”*
they all laughed. And I was
like, *“Come on guys. Don’t you
know how messy that’s gone
be? And totally unnecessary;
there’s an easier way. Why kill
him and get blood on your
hands when you could just
throw him in the pit and let him
die on his own?”* Duh?

And they shrugged and were
like, *“yeah you’re right
Reuben. You always think
through everything.”*

(Wink, wink.)

Yeah, they totally bought that
plan. What my brothers didn’t
know is that I had some dreams
of my own. I was going to
make myself the favored one. I
had been thinking about and
planning for this day for a long
time. I was tired of living in
Joseph’s shadow. That’s not the
way things were supposed to
be. How dare he mess with the
prescribed social birth order of
inheritance?

Anyway, as soon as we threw
him in the pit, my plan was to
circle back when the coast was

clear and “rescue” Joseph out of the pit which of course would make me a hero in my dad’s eyes. And who would be the favorite then? That’s right. Me. Who would Dad love now? Who rescued his “favorite son” Joseph? His NEW favorite son – Responsible Rueben.

It was a brilliant plan.

Until it wasn’t.

There’s just one thing I didn’t account for when I sneaked away from my brothers while they were eating. Judah. Greedy Judah.

Judah (*suit jacket*)

(flipping through wad of money)

Just counting my commission from my last deal. Some people say “*money can’t buy you everything*”...but I’m always like, “*I’m sorry, what world you are you living in?*”

I love money. You know how it is being a middle child – no one pays attention to you; you really have to fend for yourself. But it’s okay. It’s taught me work hard and hustle. I am the

King of Negotiation. I love to close deals. I love to make money.

In fact, that’s what happened that day. While the rest of my brothers were wasting time eating lunch, I was hustling and making a deal with the Ishmaelites. I didn’t rip them off too much. I mean they were family – my grandfather’s half-brother’s kids. That’s like what, my cousins?

Whatever, whoever they were – I sold Joseph to them. Because we’re throwing away free money if we’re gonna just let him die in that pit for nothing. He’s worth something. Of course, I didn’t want Joseph to know it was me, or anyone who might be watching for that matter, you know how juicy gossip travels in a small town.

So – I hired a middleman, I’ve got connections. I used the Midianites. It cut my profit a bit, but it was worth it to ensure that the plan worked. Sometimes you gotta spend money to make money.

You probably know the story. The Midianites hauled up Joseph from the pit, took him to

Egypt and handed him over to Potiphar – one of Pharaoh’s officials. It was all very smooth. Done in the middle of the night. No hitches.

Meanwhile, we were back killing a goat and putting the blood all over Joseph’s “fancy, fabulous” coat so we could tell my father he was attacked and killed by a wild animal.

What? You didn’t think we were gonna let him keep that coat did you? Heck no. We couldn’t rip that thing off him fast enough.

Joseph (*black hoodie*)

When you’re in a pit, it’s just you and your thoughts.

It was so dark. So lonely. So cold.

(flip up hood)

I cried until I had no tears left to cry.

I wondered why God had given me these dreams only to put me in a pit?

I called out and I prayed from the depths of my being. I was

Broken. Scared. Alone.
Abandoned.

How could my own kin, my own brothers throw me out and leave me to die? How could they ever think that was okay?

Sure, maybe I told on them and was a pain in the you-know-what...but is that an offense worthy of death? Where is the justice? The compassion? Am I not human just like them?

Clearly not. Because they sold me. And the people they sold me to, enslaved me.

Reuben (*rain coat*)

(running in)

When I looked in the pit and saw that he was gone, I was baffled. There’s no way he could’ve climbed out of there on his own. Physically impossible. But then, when I found out what had happened. I was angry.

My brothers thought I was angry that they had killed Joseph.

No, I was angry because they killed my plan to make me

number one. Forget Joseph.
This was about me “saving the day” and winning my father’s favor so that I would get his inheritance, which was rightly mine anyway – as the FIRST BORN.

It took me years to get over my anger. Only recently have I realized that a lot of that anger was probably grief. And hurt. I was just always vying for my dad’s attention and favor that I never stopped to ask myself why. Why was I constantly comparing myself to Joseph and trying to compete with him?

What was I trying to protect myself from? I don’t know. Maybe I spent so much time hating them because I couldn’t stand the fact that I hated myself. That I could never seem to do enough or be enough.

I always thought if you were prepared, then you were in control. But that was a waste of time...because you know what? It never really rains in Canaan. It’s usually a drought and famine around here. So this raincoat? All those years it was never really protecting me from

anything – it was just an illusion of protection from a projected fear about the potential future. Exactly. Makes no sense.

But the funny thing is, you know what? That day when I looked down into the pit and didn’t see Joseph? It rained. It rained hard. And I got drenched. Raincoat and all.

Gortex?...it’s got nothing on God.

Israel/Jacob (*bath robe*)

(*clinging to ornate coat*)

My heart, my soul – he’s gone.

Life isn’t worth living without Joseph.

Please Lord, wake me up from this nightmare.

I haven’t left my house in days. I don’t know if I’ll ever leave it again.

Joseph (*clergy robe w/ stole*)

Hey there. It’s been a while. So many years have passed. So much has happened since the pit. Overall, life is good. Egypt

kinda of feels like home now. I've made my way in Pharaoh's household. It hasn't been easy, but I've done it. I actually was able to work for some change within the system here. They key is NOT falling into the traps they set for you. And trying to do the right thing no matter what. There's a lot of abuse that goes on rich and powerful places. Trust me. You don't want to know. And prayer kept me going.

And dreaming. Yeah, I bet you were wondering. I still dream. In fact, it's my dreams that got me here. That and, as much as I hate to admit it, a few lessons I learned about responsibly planning from my brother Reuben, and a few lessons I learned about negotiating from my brother Judah. Turns out I had a dream about a famine that would last 7 years. But was able to plan and save grain for 7 years. And with that saved grain, I negotiated deals and I fed all the people of Egypt and people of surrounding lands too, and of course, as you know, I took care of my brothers and their families and kids.

Eventually in all of this, I couldn't hold on to the anger anymore. Just because they hadn't treated me humanely, that didn't mean I still wasn't human myself.

Part of that softening came because I got to see my dad before he died. So he knew that I hadn't dropped the ball on the promise that was supposed to pass from patriarch to patriarch...because through feeding and taking care of my brothers and their families, the twelve tribes of Israel were born...God's chosen people.

But of course I now know it wasn't a patriarchal promise, it was simply the promise OF GOD FOR the PEOPLE of God. We didn't fulfill it. I didn't fulfil it. God did. I learned that God's faithfulness and presence is the real promise. I mean, I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for God. Trust me.

And I would NOT have reconciled with my brothers if it weren't for God. Lord, have mercy. It took a couple times for me to get my act together. I deceived them and tricked them (which is not all my fault,

it's in my genes!) but I was really mean to them at times. But then I would just break down weeping. And I didn't even know why. We've all spent a lot of time hurting each other though the years. And we were tired.

No more we decided. Since dad died, the pain of the past is not worth continuing to hurt each other in the present. We had to start thinking about the future. Our future. Our legacy. We shed all the old garments that we were wearing out of habit and moved forward together. With love.

It's kind of funny actually, my brothers felt so guilty about selling me off to Egypt and they felt so much gratitude that I fed their families that they didn't understand (at first) how I could forgive them – they thought that was a holy, divine thing...and so sometimes, they actually confused ME for God.

That's exactly what I wanted when I was younger. For them to see me as special, as a "god." But now, I just want to help them see the real God.

That's what this stole is about. It's no coat of many colors. But it's the mantle of humble service, an image of growth, and it's a reminder of God's grace. A grace that is for all people of all lands, no matter what cloaks you wear.

It's this grace, God's grace, that allowed me to say to my brothers: *"though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones."* That's the "moral" of the story I guess...they even wrote that down in the Bible.

But you know, I truly believe that God can make good out of anything. And God's good-making in no way negates the harmfulness of our evil-making. God making good out of horrible stuff is not a hall pass for bad behavior. Actions have consequences. Boy do I know that to be true!

Unfortunately, as you know all too well, sometimes people aren't held accountable for their actions as they should be. Even people that should have the MOST accountability placed on

them because they hold power. It's mind-blowing. But in any situation, from court houses to private homes, until there is acknowledgement and accountability, I don't know how there can be reconciliation and forgiveness and growth. All I know is what happened in my family. And if healing happened in MY dysfunctional family – it can happen anywhere.

My whole family was dismantled – dissolved - because of actions that festered without consequences and the because of the emotions that fueled those actions that festered inside of us all. Hate can do powerful things. Ugly things.

But, by the grace of God, we rebuilt our relationships and even our family system. It took years, and we still have a long way yet to go. It's a big task. But, I mean, you're still working on it, right? We were just the first twelve tribes, you're God's people now. Don't think you're not related to us – Genesis is your DNA too...and don't think you don't have garments to shed and work to do. But be encouraged,

and remember what Genesis means. Beginnings. And remember that just because there is constant drama doesn't mean there can't be continual dreaming too. They exist side by side. They must. Because that's where the Divine is – in the drama and in the dreams.

Amen.