

Lying to Ourselves
Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28
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Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. 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. 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.

...

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 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." 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, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 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. 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." But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 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.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. 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. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

That is the word of God? That is the story of God's people? What a dysfunctional family. This has been the history of God's people this whole story. Abraham and Sarah played favorites with Isaac over Ishmael. Isaac and Rebekah played favorites with Jacob and Esau, which led to fighting, stealing, and manipulation. Now Jacob carries on the tradition of playing favorites, first with his wives, Leah and Rachel, and then with his children. And if you struggle with catching foreshadowing, this, of course, does not go well.

Joseph's brothers decide to end this favoritism by selling Joseph to some Ishmaelites which if we have been paying attention, Ishmael was kicked out in preference for Isaac by Abraham and Sarah. So now it all comes back around and Joseph the great grandson of Abraham and Sarah is being sold to the grandchildren

of the child they kicked out. Immediately after this passage the brothers lie to Jacob about what happened to Joseph which is eerily reminiscent of how Jacob deceived his own father.

But with all this deception and mistreating of one another, I want to focus on one word in the Hebrew. While Joseph is still a long way off, the brothers notice him because of his fancy cloak. The translation says that the brothers “conspired to kill him” in verse 18. Professor Roger Nam helped me deduce the meaning of this verb in Hebrew. Now this is a little nerdy but bear with me. This is a rare hitpa'el construction in Hebrew which is both reflexive and causative. So we might translate “conspire” better as “they caused deceit to themselves...”¹

They caused deceit to themselves. They lied to themselves. What an interesting phrase? How did they do this? I am sure each of the ten brothers had slightly different feelings and motives behind this deception. I bet that some of them had been harboring resentment and hate towards their brother because of their lack of love from their father. I bet that some of them feared that their futures would be less than because their brother was receiving preferential treatment. I bet some of them were annoyed at how he had dreams about being in charge of them.

¹ Roger Nam - http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4546

They deceived themselves, turning their feelings towards their father and/or brother into hatred and almost murder.

And so I start to wonder, how do we deceive ourselves? “Well at least I don’t look like them, act like them...” What stories do we tell ourselves to boost up our ego while simultaneously lowering the value of others? “If I give up my privilege will there be enough for me?” Do we believe the lie that there is not enough for everyone? “They are a criminal so they deserve whatever they get.” Do we define someone by their worst action in order to take away their humanity and distance ourselves from their suffering? What other lies do we listen to?

These lies will only continue the cycle of pain and violence that our world seems so steeped in. These lies will tear us and others down with no recourse for healing. It is only when we confront these lies and start telling the truth that change can occur, that healing can begin, that reconciliation can even start.

I wonder how we might engage in truth telling in our world today. If you are ever on social media, you might find yourself bombarded with half truths in memes or even downright lies sent from nefarious websites, but you can always fact check these with sites that you trust. If you pay attention to the news you might have trouble sorting out which anchor or show to believe, but if you test those claims against other sources you might begin to see the truth. You might hear rumors in

our city about which nonprofits are good or bad or which homeless people are worthy or not, but if you start to build relationships with these humans you might find that you were deceived.

My friends, this story is an open invitation for all of us to step into the light. To turn away from the lies and deceptions that we tell ourselves, that the world tells us, and to turn towards God's love, grace, and justice so that in all things God's light would direct our path and we might share that light with a world in need. The world is in desperate need of the truth, God's truth. A truth that calls out wrongs and evils and offers new and creative paths of life and abundance. So join with us on this journey, while we search out God's truth and learn to live into that loving abundance with ourselves and with our world. Amen.

Come and sing with me the hymn based on St Francis's poem and make us channels of God's peace.

Responding Hymn - #753 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace