

Day 17 :: Feb. 23

In today's reading we re-encounter Joseph's family back in Canaan where they too are experiencing a severe famine. Jacob sends 10 of his sons to Egypt to buy grain, keeping Benjamin by his side for fear that harm might come to him (Benny is the only boy left from Jacob's union with his beloved Rachel). The brothers arrive in Egypt and bow down before the Governor of Egypt and Comptroller of the grain market...Joseph himself!! They do not recognize their brother (now a grown man), but Joseph instantly recognizes them. Imagine Joseph's surprise to see his brothers again....and I'm certain a million thoughts raced through his mind. Did he instantly plot revenge, was he filled with joy, did his heart soar or was it hardened by memories of their betrayal and all the suffering he'd had to endure?? We DO know that he remembered his childhood dreams and how boastful he had been back then. With years of humbling and maturing experiences behind him, Joseph no longer needs to boast about his status in those dreams; he does not feel a need to say "I told you so!" Sometimes it's better to remain quiet, even when we'd like to have the last word.

Joseph does decide, however, to play some nasty games with his brothers, at least in the short run. He accuses them of being spies, puts them all in prison for three days, and finally sends them home to their father (minus one brother) armed with grain and an order to return with their youngest brother or they would all die. Here Reuben does have a need to say "I told you so", even though he too had been complicit in the original plot against Joseph. Consequences for sin may be delayed, but they seem to follow us in one way or another, don't they? And did you wonder why Joseph wanted so desperately to see his younger brother...his only full blooded brother? Did he want to see if Benjamin had been abused too and if his big brothers had indeed changed their ways?

The plot thickens as the brothers return home to Jacob, and Joseph continues his shenanigans. The brothers find the payments for the grain hidden in their sacks. They are terrified. Jacob refuses at first to release Benjamin. But as the famine continues he must take the risk of sending his youngest son to Egypt for the greater good. Jacob (in this case at least) shows himself to be a man of integrity as he doubles the original payment for the grain and includes the best products of the land as a gift. A reputation for honesty is worth more than the money one might gain by compromising it.

We finish today's reading at the feast Joseph had requested to celebrate his brothers' return. The brothers enter fearfully and plead their case to the Household Manager. And now we get a glimpse of how Joseph's witness to the Almighty God has spread to others in the Royal household. The Manager assures the brothers that all is well and releases Simeon to join the party. The 12 brothers are together for the first time in years! Joseph is finally ready to hear more about his extended family, and this news brings him to tears. No reunion yet, but the temperature is rising!

I thought it was interesting to note a couple of details about the formal seating arrangement at the feast. Joseph, even though he had achieved a highly respected rank, was still a Hebrew, despised by the Egyptians in the room who refused to eat with him, and thus he was seated alone. And also, Joseph, who had not seen his brothers in all those years, was still able to seat them according to their age, from oldest to youngest. And they feasted and drank freely with him.

Take a deep breath as we prepare to enter the next plot twist in this story!