

A Coat with Long Sleeves

A Sermon by Rich Holmes on Genesis 45: 1-15

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The story of Joseph is one of the best stories in the bible, and as you may know, some years ago it was made into a musical called *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. What you may not know, though is that this title is based on a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament which says that Joseph had a coat of many colors but a better translation says it was a coat with long sleeves. Joseph, you see, was one of twelve sons of Jacob but we are told that his father had more affection for Joseph than any of his other sons and out of his affection one day he made him a coat with long sleeves. Now, as you know, the fact that you are your parents' favorite child is enough by itself to cause your other siblings to be jealous of you, but there was something else about Joseph which made his brothers even more jealous. You see, God gave Joseph the power to interpret dreams, and this was a power not only to interpret other people's dreams, but even his own. So one night Joseph had a couple of dreams, and he interpreted these dreams to mean that all of his other brothers would one day bow down to him and serve him, and here's the thing, he actually told them that. Now, if your brothers already know that you are their father's favorite son, if you should have a dream that they are one day going to bow down to you, I think some good advice is that you might not want to tell them. But he did, and you would surely not be surprised to know that they all now hated Joseph, and they hated him intensely. So one day, all his brothers were out in the fields and Joseph came looking for them, and as they saw him coming from a long way off, they conspired together and said let's kill him. But soon enough they see a caravan approaching that was traveling from Egypt and they decided it would be a better idea to sell Joseph to these

Egyptians as a slave. So they did. And away went Joseph bound in chains. Now, naturally they didn't want to tell their father Jacob that they just sold his favorite son as a slave, so they decided to cover up what they did by slaughtering a goat, and they took Joseph's coat with long sleeves and they dipped it in the goat's blood, and then they went to their poor father and said look how Joseph has been killed by an animal.

So, as Jacob is beside himself with inconsolable grief, meanwhile Joseph finds himself living a life of servitude, thinking to himself that this is how it would be for the rest of his life, but while Joseph was a slave in Egypt, one day his master's wife tried to seduce him. Joseph being loyal to his master said no, and so she became angry and accused Joseph of trying to take advantage of her. It was all a big lie, but when it comes to a dispute between one's wife and one's slave, when the master's wife says one thing and his slave says another, who do you think the master's going to believe? So Joseph's slave master had him thrown into prison for a crime he never committed.

Now surely, things at this point could not be any worse for Joseph. He had been given these dreams where he would rule over his brothers but those dreams now seemed as disconnected from the way his life would turn out as any crazy dream. The reality was that Joseph was a slave and not just a slave, he was a slave in prison. How much lower can you get? But just when things couldn't get any worse for Joseph, his fate started turning around. Word got around that Joseph had this power to explain dreams, and then one day Egypt's pharaoh awoke from a restless night greatly disturbed about two of his dreams. In the first of Pharaoh's dreams, there were seven fat cows who came down to the banks of the Nile and grazed on the grass, and then after the seven fat cows arrived there came seven cows who were sickly and

thin. The thin cows ate up the fat cows, but the thin cows were just as thin and sickly as before. In the second dream there were seven ears of grain that were full and healthy and seven other ears of grain that were thin and withered. And the thin and withered ears ate up the full and healthy ears.

Well, Pharaoh tried to find anyone to interpret his dreams. He summoned all his royal magicians to his court and told them all about the cows and the ears of grain, but none of them knew what to say. They just shrugged their shoulders and walked away. But then Pharaoh came to hear about this slave in prison who knew what dreams meant, and he called for him. So Joseph was dragged into Pharaoh's court, and by the power of the Spirit of God, he was able to explain to Pharaoh just what these dreams were all about. The seven fat cows would be seven years of plenty where the rains fall and the crops grow, and then the seven thin and sickly cows would be seven years of famine. The same was true of the ears of grain. The healthy ones represented the seven years of plenty, and the unhealthy ones represented the famine that would follow. In the next seven years, God was saying, the world will enjoy plenty of rain and crops would abound. The harvest will be plentiful. But no one should squander what they have in these years because famine is coming. Seven more years are coming when nothing will grow and no rains will fall. So in these seven years of a bountiful harvest, it would be wise to store up the excess crops, those, that is, that can be stored away like grain so that the people can survive these seven years of drought that are coming afterward.

Well, Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's gift that he pardoned him from prison but not only did he pardon him, but he made him his second in command over all of Egypt. Now, imagine that. Imagine going from being not just a prisoner, but an enslaved prisoner to

becoming Mike Pence. In an instant. In the time you could make instant coffee. Just imagine!

And Pharaoh followed Joseph's advice. In the seven years of plenty that followed, Egypt did indeed store away all their excess grain for the seven years of famine. But this was a worldwide famine, not just an Egyptian famine. So guess what the other nations of the world didn't do. The other nations of the world didn't prepare, and so back in the land of Canaan where Jacob and all his son's live, everyone was starving and the cupboards were all bare. So still believing that his son Joseph is long dead, and knowing nothing about his position in Egypt, Jacob says to his other sons go to Egypt and buy grain so we may eat and not starve to death. But his son Benjamin stays behind because Jacob is worried that something bad will happen to him if he goes. Now, I say that Joseph had eleven brothers, but if you want to get technical, ten of these brothers were actually half-brothers with a different mom. Benjamin was the only true brother to Joseph and because Jacob believed Joseph was dead and that Benjamin was the last remaining son that he had with his wife Rachel, he wanted to keep him safe. So while Benjamin stays behind, the ten other brothers go to buy grain and who do you think they run into? There stands Joseph, but they don't know that it is Joseph, even though he recognizes them. Naturally they wouldn't recognize him because they expect him to be a slave, not Pharaoh's right hand man. And as he looks at his ten other brothers he accuses them of being spies from Canaan. They say no we're not spies, we are just a Caananite family who is trying to buy food to keep from starving in this terrible famine, and our father Jacob is back at home with our other brother Benjamin who didn't make the trip. So Joseph says, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll hold one of you here prisoner until all of you come back with your brother Benjamin, and if you don't bring Benjamin back, not only will your brother not get out of prison, you won't even be

able to buy any food.” So now the nine remaining brothers return home while Simeon stays behind in prison. So they get back to see their father in Canaan, and they explain all that happened about how they were accused of being spies and how this man is holding Simeon and won’t let us get any more food until we can return with Benjamin, but their father is naturally horrified. He pleads with them not to take Benjamin back, I’ve already lost Joseph and I can’t lose my only remaining son from Rachel. But as I have said this famine is seven years long, and so of course there will come a time when they need to go buy more food. So, one day they go back to Egypt, and this time, of course, they have to bring Benjamin. So as they arrive back in Egypt to buy food, Joseph has a great feast prepared for them, and after they eat and drink and talk it comes time for them to leave with their sacks of grain that they came to buy. But Joseph directs his servants to plant his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack, and then Benjamin is accused of stealing and he is arrested. Well, of course this is horrible to Joseph’s brothers, so they fall on their knees before him and beg him to let Benjamin go. They explain to him that as far as their father knows, Benjamin’s only brother is dead and that if something happens to him, their father Jacob won’t be able to take it. So as Joseph listens to this story he hears the news that his father Jacob who is now an old man is still alive and he tells all his servants to leave his presence, and now standing there alone with all his brothers, he finally shows them who he is. And there is this wonderful tearful reunion where there is true forgiveness and reconciliation. So the brothers go back to Canaan and they see their father Jacob and this time they have much happier news for him than they did on their first journey. They tell him all about how Joseph was never really dead, but the truth is they sold him into slavery and that whole story they told where they showed him the coat with long sleeves was soaked in blood, that was all a

lie and yet because God was looking out for him he rose to power to become Pharaoh's right hand man. It is all unbelievable of course, but after finally being convinced of the truth of the story through a dream, Jacob finally makes the journey to Egypt along with all his sons to see Joseph whom he for so many years thought was dead. And there is of course another tearful reunion, and Jacob is now ready to die in peace because all his pain and grief have come to an end, and he has everything he ever wished for.

It is of course a wonderful story, but you may wonder how something like this could be possible. I could see some people being confused and saying to themselves why didn't Joseph kill all his brothers as soon as he laid eyes on them. Why didn't he get revenge on all these people who made him suffer so much, now that he had the power to do so? Who would have stopped him? Well, maybe you say to yourselves because Joseph loved his father. His father had never done any harm to him and he didn't want to make his father grieve by doing any harm to his other sons. He'd already been through enough. So, he didn't get revenge not for their sake, but for his father's sake. That's possible. You remember how when you were a kid and you'd fight with your sibling and your mother would say stop fighting you're breaking my heart. In other words, if you won't stop fighting for the sake of your brother or sister, stop fighting for my sake. Right? Of course your mother said that to you. And then, naturally when you both realized that you were making mom sad, you both stopped fighting, right? No of course not. Because right then and there your brother or sister smacked you and said look what you're doing you're breaking your mother's heart. No you are, no you are. But you might think it was for the sake of his father that Joseph didn't get revenge on his brothers, and so naturally when Jacob finally died, all the brothers were afraid. They were afraid that now that dad was

dead Joseph will get revenge. And so they went to Joseph saying spare us, we will be your slaves, we will do anything you want. But Joseph said to them don't be afraid, for you see, what you intended for harm, God intended for good. You intended to harm me by either killing me or selling me as a slave, but God used my presence in Egypt to save a nation and to save my family, so what you intended for harm, God intended for good. You see, Joseph didn't forgive because he was a good person. You hear that sometimes. There is a saying to err is human, but to forgive is divine, as if it takes a divine person to forgive. But Joseph did not forgive his brothers because he was a good person. He forgave them because God turned around all the harm they had done to him. He forgave because he knew that as long as God was looking out for him, his brothers were powerless to do anything to him.

Isn't that the difference between those who forgive and those who don't? It isn't that those who forgive are any better than those who don't. But when we remain angry or we want revenge what is it that we're angry about? Why is it that we seek revenge? Isn't it because we feel that whatever someone did to us has damaged us in some way? Isn't it because we feel that something has been taken from us that would otherwise make our lives complete? Isn't that it? But when we discover that God is in control of our lives and that whatever harm someone might have done to us is part of God's plan to make everything work out for good, then what is there to be angry about? What is there to avenge?

What you intended for harm, God intended for good. Had I not been taken as a slave into Egypt, I could not have told Pharaoh what his dreams meant. Had I not told Pharaoh what his dreams meant I could not have saved an entire nation and I could not have saved you. Isn't it

funny how God does things? What you meant for evil, God meant for good. So it was with Joseph. So it is with all of us.