

## Here Comes the Dreamer (Part II)

*Genesis 45: 1-15*

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Remember how Joseph’s story began with a dream? It was a dream where his brothers bowed down before him. His dream, of course, caused issues between him and his brothers. Remember: he went from being thrown into the pit into a life of slavery. From there, he got a good job, but was then thrown into prison for a crime he didn’t commit. In prison he began interpreting dreams and was used to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams which warned Pharaoh of a famine which would cripple the global economy. This earned Joseph a spot on Pharaoh’s trusted cabinet. Now Joseph is in charge of agriculture and is selling grain. And it is here we drop in on his brothers coming to him for help in their time of need during the famine. But remember: it all began with a dream. A dream that hasn’t quite gone according to plan.

Well, we get it. We know what it is like when the dream does not play out the way we envisioned. I recently saw a clever t-shirt which had the year 2020 on it with a one-star rating beneath it. It reads, “Very bad, would not recommend!” This year has been hard on dreams.

Maybe this was the year we were going to take the big vacation. We called the travel agent, bought plane tickets, dreamed of sipping wine in vineyards or sightseeing abroad. But in 2020 the dream has been grounded.

Or I think about school beginning tomorrow. How students are firing up their laptops and having to navigate this link or that app. And how stressful it has been for our teachers who have had to learn and prepare. Many whom did not get time away or a break and who would have dreamed we would be where we are right now. The dreams often come with detours and derailments, disappointments and demands that are outside of our control.

One night when Joy and I were engaged, Joy had a dream. She dreamt that I was in seminary studying to become a pastor. Joy called me the next day and demanded a meeting. She asked if I had any intentions of going into ministry work, because that could be a deal breaker for her. You see, both her parents were pastors, and it was not her dream to spend the rest of her life with someone who might be as unavailable as they were. We all know how that dream turned out. Our dreams, they twist and turn and bend; the journey has a bit of road construction and there is often a cost; even when the dream comes true.

After a long round about journey, with many highs and lows, Joseph's dream is finally coming true. His brothers don't realize it is him, but they come in their time of need asking for help—they bow down to him. Imagine what Joseph was feeling. All the memories of their betrayal come galivanting back. All the nights he spent sitting in prison reliving what they did to him and how he ended up there. And now, he has the power—they are bowing down to him. But when his opportunity comes, instead of seeking retribution, he chooses to grieve and to forgive them. It reminds me of a story awhile back of a man who was exonerated after serving decades in prison for a crime he didn't commit. As he stepped out of the iron gates of the penitentiary, reporters asked him if he could forgive the system which put him behind bars for almost 30 years. After weeping for a moment he said, "I must forgive them. They took away too many years of my life, I refuse to let them take away any more." Perhaps that is how Joseph feels: he refuses to let them take away any more of his life. But we know forgiveness is complicated and a process and painful when reconciliation isn't possible. The vision Joseph had is finally coming true. Now is his chance to get even. But instead he forgives, and he lets it go.

But here is where things get theologically interesting. Joseph becomes a theologian, saying God intended for all of this to happen. While it would be bad theology to say God was the orchestrator of Joseph's suffering (or any of ours for that matter), we might be able to say that there is something bigger at work here because God doesn't waste anything. God will use whatever situation we find ourselves in as an opportunity to bring repair to what is broken; to breathe life into what is dead. You see, this is about God's dream—about being a new kind of people. God's dream is not about someone who was the underdog finally having the power to get even. This only continues the cycle of violence and do we not have enough of that in the world? No, God's dream is about redemption. It's about empowering us to have the courage to end the cycle of resentment. It's about a new kind of people who are formed through the power of forgiveness.

In the Hebrew language the word for forgiveness is attached to the verb which means “to dance.” God’s deepest desire is for all of us to be people who are free to dance.

There was a story we heard during a Restorative Justice workshop about a young man who stole a woman’s car and ended up wrecking it. Eventually, they sat down together with a mediator and the mediator asked the woman what she needed to begin to heal from the offense. She said she wasn’t sure, but knew she wanted to work something out. So the mediator asked the young man what he was good at and he said, “I am an artist who draws and does paintings. But I doubt I could paint anything that would be worth the value of a car.” “Actually,” the woman interrupted, “I have a big wall that needs a painting. If you would be willing to do a painting, I think that could work.” They ended up forming a new bond through a relationship where the woman was able to offer the young man the most powerful gift she could: the gift of returning him to himself. And, in doing so she is also being returned to herself. They are dancing.

It makes me wonder how God’s Spirit is breathing life into the Black Lives Matter movement as they dance down the streets in protest; or where God’s Spirit might be working within the COVID-19 mess; how God might be using this as an opportunity to form a new kind of people.

Friends, God’s love is bigger than what we’ve done. God’s love is also bigger than what has been done to us. We are being set free to dance. And when God’s dream is becoming true the church says, “Amen and amen.”