

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 9, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Pack Light. Expect Detours."

Based on Genesis 37:1-4; 12-28

Jacob was a man who had been richly blessed twice in his life. He had been born into a wealthy family and had known the luxury of servants and fine food and the many privileges that are afforded those of means. He lost it all, by his own hand and his own bad decisions, and gained it all back again, with hard work and time, a keen eye for breeding quality animals, and the odd deal on the side.

We meet Jacob again today, on the cusp of moving into quieter, gentler days of later age, with many sons to take care of the family business, yet energy enough to run after grandchildren. But as always with Jacob, it's difficult to know whether to take him at face value or not. Throughout his whole life, Jacob had maintained this love-hate relationship with YHWH. His dependence on his Creator would ebb and flow like the waves on a beach. When times became desperate, he would pause, and listen to YHWH's whispers, and cling to the idea of a better life in His presence. But then a good deal would come along, and YHWH would be pushed into the background

for a while. So you are always left wondering what Jacob's intentions really were: for God or for Jacob?

So here we are today, asking the same question, yet again. Jacob had many fine sons. Eleven in fact. The most famous of all was his favourite: Joseph. Joseph was the youngest, spoiled like his father had been, and a tattletale to boot! "Dad, Reuben rode the camel in the back forty when you weren't looking. Dad, Judah went behind the haystack with a girl at the barn dance. Dad, the boys drank your ginger beer when you were in town." Every family's got one!

Things didn't get any better when Joseph started having dreams about becoming more powerful than all of them and not being wise enough to keep his visions to himself. But the straw that broke the camel's back was the day Jacob went shopping on Rodeo Drive and brought back a designer coat worth a fortune for Joseph, and a candy bar for the rest of them. The simmering hostility and jealousy towards Joseph boiled up and was quickly coming to blows.

So Jacob sent the boys out on a long road trip with the sheep, and kept Joseph at home, hoping I suspect that a little

time and space might help things simmer down. Days passed, and suddenly Jacob decided to send Joseph out to find the boys and track them down. Why, you might ask? Me too! So hold on to that question for a minute.

Joseph headed out alone into the desert, and eventually founds his brothers, in his shiny new coat of course. So shiny, the brothers could see him coming, and in case you missed it, their rage had not settled down much. Here was their chance. Kill him in the desert and let the wild animals pick at his bones. No one would ever know. "Good plan," they all agreed.

But Reuben started to get a little gun shy as Joseph approached. He suggested an alternative: shove him in a dry well, and let the desert do the killing for them. No blood on their hands, and they could look Daddy in the eye when they got home. "An even better plan," they all agreed.

By chance, or by holy design, a travelling caravan happened by their camp, headed towards Egypt, far, far away. The boys looked at one another, and saw dollar signs. New plan. Sell Joseph to the caravan and split the money. No one has to kill anyone, no blood on anyone's

conscious, yet the problem child is gone from the picture. "Yes, this was the best plan of all." Here ends Chapter 1 of Joseph's story.

So back to that question we have been holding on to. Why exactly, did Jacob send Joseph out to find his brothers?

- Alone in a dangerous desert.
- His favourite son.
- In the fancy coat that was sure to antagonize like a red poncho at the bull fights in Spain.
- Knowing that the brothers were consumed with anger about Joseph, and were capable of hurting or harming him.

Why, Jacob, did you send your son out on such a perilous trip?

Some say, it was a test of Joseph: that Jacob could see the potential in Joseph to become the cool-headed leader of the family for the next generation, and wanted to test his loyalty to the family and obedience to his father. It may be that just like Jacob had bucked the system of family inheritance when his father was growing old, Jacob recognized that the best 'man for the job' was not necessarily the 'oldest' son, as tradition had always been, and he wanted to see all his hard work passed on to the son who would continue to make the family fortune grow.

Some say, it was a test of the brothers: when the opportunity came, would they act emotionally and violently, to satisfy their jealousy, or would

cooler heads prevail when push came to shove? We know that at least Reuben struggled with the decision to kill Joseph and secretly planned to rescue him. Perhaps this was the kind of thing Jacob was hoping for: a reconciliation between brothers.

Some say, it was a test of YHWH. In the same way that Abraham was tested by YHWH to sacrifice his son Isaac, perhaps Jacob was hoping (or demanding?) of YHWH, a cliffhanger breakthrough at the last moment, as had been afforded Abraham?

But the wary side of my wonders: did Jacob throw his favourite son under the bus, in order to protect himself? Jacob had been a man who had spent all of his life scheming and making deals to get ahead. And only when the world turned upside down, did he spend much time contemplating his Creator. Is it possible that in his mind, the more he listened to YHWH, the more difficult his life became, and the more he relied on his own cunning, the richer he became? Is it possible that he pushed Joseph away because he was trying to push YHWH away? Is it possible that he recognized Joseph as a young man of visions who was being molded by YHWH for some greater purpose, and wanted nothing of it, because every time Jacob put YHWH first, his wealth and this ego had to be put second? Would a father do that to his son? I do not know.

My friends, we push God away from us, and pull Him towards us, back and forth for most of our lives.

We hear His whispers, and sometimes we listen, and sometimes we laugh it off. **We** feel Him directing our attention in a specific way, and we turn and look the other way, fooling ourselves into believing we know better. **Sometimes**, we show Him blatant disregard because it is more fun, more exciting or more profitable to disobey. **We** test God. **We** hurt God. **We** ignore God.

But in the end, it does not matter. For God's will is done, with your help, or with someone else's help. With your support and prayers, or in spite of your lack of effort. God's will continue to move forward even if you are stubborn and uncooperative. He simply finds another way, a willing believer, a path of lesser resistance. But how much more exciting to be part of the plan, than to be a pothole in the middle of the road. In the end, God will see that you arrive at the destination and destiny He has chosen for you. The question is, are you going to pack light and rely on Him, or delay the caravan with all your baggage? Pack light. Expect Detours. Enjoy the trip. Amen.