

Genesis 42:1-13

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" ² He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

³ Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. ⁵ So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.

⁶ Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

"From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food."

⁸ Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. ⁹ Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

¹⁰ "No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies."

¹² "No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

¹³ But they replied, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more."

John 15:5-11

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

None of us read scripture as neutrals. Whether it's Old Testament or New Testament we bring something to the text we're reading.

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits would approve because he said that when we engage with scripture and use our imagination and our capacity to interpret then we're really entering into it, we're wrestling with it, immersing in it, by the work of the Spirit being shaped and formed by it.

Inevitably what we understand and experience from our reading can differ from someone else, we're unique after all. When I read a passage different things speak to me than when, for example, Gilly reads a passage. She spoke a couple of weeks ago on part of the Joseph story.

Just wait until you hear Michael next week reflecting on the beginning of the Moses story – his insights are wonderful and valuable and very different to my own reading of that story.

A long narrative like the Joseph saga is one I find I can immerse in and reflect on, but I'm well aware I interpret it based on my own life experience and understanding of people and the spiritual life.

I've used the Enneagram personality system to characterise Joseph from what I read of him.

I detect in the story the spiritual growth from a self absorbed and boastful young man to a mature man trusting in God and placing God first in his dealings with Pharaoh.

Perhaps what makes the story true to life is that Joseph hasn't become a saint. We haven't enough time to read all of the chapters in how he deals with his brothers and manipulates them into bring his younger sibling Benjamin to Egypt. The way I read it...he has a bit of fun at their expense.

Before we get to that, in today's passage it says Then he remembered his dreams. The dreams he had as a young man were all fulfilled. What did they mean to him when he was 17? Did he recall them as the years passed by? Did those dreams sustain him when he was a slave, when in prison. Was he able to keep trusting because somehow God would work his purpose out.

When Joseph finally reveals his identity to his brothers this is what he says (chapter 45)

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five

years there will be no ploughing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.^[a]

It now all makes sense, the strange dreams, the roller coaster life, the growing experience of the work of God's Spirit within him. He is there to save the lives of Jacob's family...but through Joseph the whole nation of Egypt is saved as well.

Theologians refer to this as a type. A type foreshadowing Jesus who came to save God's people the Jews but also every nation on earth.

Joseph is so convinced of what God is doing through him he is able to see everything as part of God's master plan to save the family of Jacob.

It opens up one of the biggest questions and one many people struggle with. The bad things that have happened in my life – is that part of God's plan?

I believe God works in and through the random things that happen in all our lives. I don't believe God causes them, but uses them they don't prevent his purposes.

At the beginning of the Joseph story his brothers are determined to kill him but I see God's intervention through Reuben who prevents the killing. Joseph is sold as a slave to Egypt, his trajectory is set and God has his hand on Joseph so that through it all his purpose is brought about.

It's God's sovereign plan that Joseph has embraced and this invites us to do the same.

What do we sing?

All I have and all I am is yours....

This story invites us to let our lives be the means through which God's purpose is worked out and that includes all the difficult things we've experienced.

Living by faith is NOT an easy option.

I chose a familiar Gospel passage to compliment the end of the Joseph saga – from John 15 the illustration of the vine and the branches.

Jesus encourages us – remain in me (he says) and I will remain in you. If you are apart from me, you can do nothing.

It's a lesson we only have to learn about a million times...because how frequently do we try to be self-sufficient? God has no measure for the grace available to each of us. He never tires of our prayers, he never tires of our requests, he will never fail when we ask for his help.

Whether all is going well, or life is an uphill slog, if you are seeing one prayer after another answered or it seems that God must be deaf; in good times and bad we say "here I am. Use me."

And no force in heaven or earth will prevent God working his purpose out through you and through me.