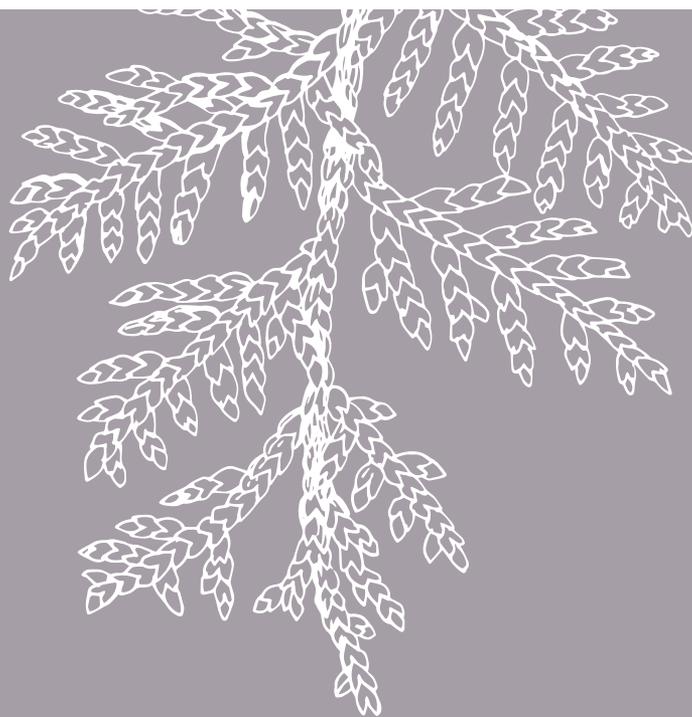


JOURNEY THROUGH GENESIS



50 DAYS OF

Eastertide

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL

by the pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville

WEEK 6

SUNDAY, MAY 17

READ

Genesis 36

REFLECT

In the 9th chapter of Ecclesiastes, we find these disturbing words, “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten.” (Ecc. 9:5). Death not only snuffed out your life, but also any memory of your name. To be remembered, to have your name written down in history was paramount in ancient times. Tracing one’s lineage was a testament to the pride and importance of a family. So it is quite odd that here in Genesis 36 we discover 41 verses devoted to the lineage of Esau. Esau—the older brother whose rivalry with the chosen one, Jacob, created great conflict and mistrust in the earlier chapters of our story. Why would his genealogy be included here? Why would he be recognized in this way?

It is all a part of God’s story. Though Edom is not chosen as Israel is, its people still matter to God. Both Jacob and Esau’s houses are flourishing and so Esau must move to Edom. This at first may seem unfair, but it is a sign that God has blessed Esau with many descendants and has remained faithful. He remembered Esau and by including this list of descendants, the readers of Genesis will remember him too.

RESPOND

Are there times in your life you’ve felt forgotten? Like the runner-up? Second best? Times when you’ve witnessed the success of others and wondered when it would be your turn? The story of Esau can feel unjust to our modern ears, and yet, God does not abandon Esau or his family. Just as God provided for Hagar and Ishmael while still keeping his promises to Isaac (Genesis 21), we see God does not leave Esau to wither away. God provides him with many offspring (41 verses worth!).

PRAY

Lord, your ways are not our ways. We often don’t understand your timing or your plans, but we see again and again in your Word that you are faithful. Help us to trust that and remember our story is only part of a greater salvation narrative you are weaving throughout all time and history. We are grateful that all is in your hands through Christ. It is in His name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 18

READ

Genesis 37

REFLECT

It probably wasn't easy being Joseph's brother. For starters, their dad made it pretty clear that Joseph was the favorite son. That long-sleeved coat was not the wisest parenting move. Secondly, Joseph's dreams were offensive and annoying. If dreams are a window into our subconscious, it's clear that humility was not Joseph's strong suite. We can't pick our family. For the most part, we are stuck with them. We're "supposed to" love our family members even if we don't like them. The only reason that we tolerate each other is because we're family. That's what makes families complicated. In Genesis 37 it's clear - Joseph's family is extra complicated. His brothers don't love or even like their little brother. They are actually ready to kill him. Much can be said here about the hurt we may experience from family. If we don't resolve that hurt or at least bring it into the light, it has a tendency to fester and grow into deep resentment. It's clear that Joseph epitomizes some deep seeded unresolved hurt that his brothers carried. During this pandemic we've likely spent a lot of time with family. While we may not have gone so far as plotting a family member's murder, we might have been okay with a few family members spending the night in the bottom of a pit. If we've been paying attention to the sermons on Sundays, we know the Joseph story and we know that the family resentment will end in reconciliation. In Christ Jesus we have been reconciled with God and one another. God refuses to allow resentment to fester between us and instead offers us grace, forgiveness and love as a part of the family of God. The second letter to the Corinthians reminds that we have been entrusted with Christ's ministry of reconciliation. We are called ambassadors of this reconciling love. That does not mean we magically cease hurting or being hurt by those closest to us, but it does mean we can present Christ's love to the world by the way we practice love, grace, and forgiveness in our families.

RESPOND

Reflect on your family. Is there any unresolved hurt? Have you noticed any resentment? What would it look like for you to offer that resentment to God? Could the unique season of this pandemic be a potential season to practice honesty, reconciliation, and God's grace in your family?

PRAY *(italicized words added to this prayer of confession from PCUSA Book of Common Worship Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993; p. 88)*

Gracious God, our hurts are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what our hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment. Set us free from a past that we cannot change; open to us a future in which we can be changed; and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image, through Jesus Christ, the reconciling light of the world.

TUESDAY, MAY 19

READ

Genesis 38

REFLECT

I have a colleague in ministry who grew up in another church tradition. That church, he said, specialized in “ten-foot sins.” He meant, “things you could see with your eyes from a distance of ten feet,” such as drinking alcohol or wearing a skirt that was too short. I wonder how his church dealt with Genesis 38!

Tamar: treated unjustly by her father-in-law, yet declared righteous by him after she tricked him into sex for pay.

Tamar: one of four women in the genealogy of our Savior who “engages in sexual activity of a questionable sort.”

Might Jesus have had in mind women like Tamar when he said, “the prostitutes are going into the kingdom before you”?

RESPOND

What impact does this chapter have on your view of the Bible?

What impact does it have on your view of the God testified to in the Bible?

PRAY

Sovereign Lord, I confess that your election puzzles me, and even shocks me. Keep me modest by reminding me of Tamar, of Rahab, of Jacob the schemer, of the dishonest manager, of the tax collector, and of Zacchaeus. What a strange collection of saints you call! Enable me to sit with them, and to rejoice your willingness to take on flesh, dine with sinners, and even “become sin” so that we might become righteous, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

READ

Genesis Chapter 39

REFLECT

There are several recurrent themes in Joseph's life that are beautifully reflected in Chapter 39 of Genesis. One theme is the pattern that takes Joseph from the top to the bottom and then back to the top. From his position as the favored son, Joseph is literally plunged into the pit. From the pit, Joseph becomes a respected and successful servant in the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, and rises to a position of leadership. By the end of Chapter 39, Joseph finds himself in prison. Yet, even in prison, Joseph gains favor in the sight of the chief jailor, who places Joseph in a position of leadership.

The most important theme of Joseph's life is repeated four times in Chapter 39: "The Lord was with Joseph." Because the Lord was with Joseph, the Lord caused all that he did to prosper. God was at work in Joseph's life for good. God was orchestrating the placement of Joseph where he would be needed, a place that would allow Joseph to serve to save his family and a place that would lead to reconciliation and restoral of relationship.

Even though Joseph could not know what God was up to, Joseph did not lose heart. Wherever he was, Joseph continued to make decisions pleasing to God and to faithfully use the gifts and opportunities given him to serve and bless others.

RESPOND

Have you ever found yourself in what appeared to be a "hopeless" situation and yet, the situation resolved itself in an amazing way? What brought you through these deep waters? What sustained you? Was your faith in God strengthened by this experience?

What positive things could result from the challenges so many people are facing during this pandemic? Do you see any ways that God may be using our present-day challenges for good? What positive things do you hope come from this global pandemic and the decisions and actions that we and others make?

PRAY

Gracious God, Thank you for the wondrous ways You are at work in our world. Help us to trust in You as our refuge and strength, our rock and our Redeemer. We pray for all who are suffering illness, discouragement, loneliness or lack of the necessities of life. Thank You for all those serving to ease the pain and distress of others, all those who are praying to You and all those who are seeking to share their blessings with others in need. Grant us eyes to see how You are work in our midst and the faith to serve You faithfully even when we are not sure where our path is taking us. We know You will never leave us or forsake us, for You have promised to always be with us. Our hope and our trust are in You, our God. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 21

READ

Genesis 40

REFLECT

Joseph spends a lot of time in prison. Those locked-up-I-don't-want-to-be-here kind of places are often where the Lord does his best work in and through us. Joseph is ministering to two men who have had their lives turned upside down. Both the cup-bearer and the baker are people of high rank who have fallen out of the good graces of Pharaoh. Joseph interprets their dreams. Well, he doesn't exactly interpret. Instead, he shares with them what the Lord has revealed to him.

It would take longer than we have here to unpack the Egyptian understanding of dreams and then to compare and contrast that to the Hebrew way of thinking about dreams. The short answer is that these dreams represent that Truth isn't something we access internally but is actually gifted to us. As theologians put it, truth is a revelation from God. This is a radical thought for us living in 21st North America. We're led to believe that the most important truths are self-evident, a matter of the heart, emotions, and intellect. The scriptures have a different understanding: If we want to know the meaning of life, let alone a dream, then we need to look to the gift that is revealed to us, the gift that God gives in his Word, written and incarnate.

RESPOND

How do you make decisions? What role do the Scriptures play in helping to shape your understanding of God, of the world, and of what it means to be human?

PRAY

Jesus, help us to inhabit the dream that is your gift of Holy Scripture. Be alive in me. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 22

READ

Genesis 41:1-57

REFLECT

Joseph goes from life at home as the favored son, to a pit, and from that pit to a respected servant, and from being that respected servant, to a jail cell, and from his jail cell, he then goes on to rule over all of Egypt, only with regard to the throne was Pharaoh greater than Joseph. The journey from the bottom to the top is a pathway that God is rather familiar with. Here Joseph experiences the roller coaster of life as being thrust from one low point to a place of honor. Jesus certainly knew, as we profess, the grave before he sat at the right hand of God. This sort of accent is a pathway written deep into the story of the good news. All who have professed faith in Jesus have come to terms with their depravity; and their inability to bring about a better future for themselves. Yet, the good news is just that; that Jesus is abundantly capable of redeeming us from our graves, and restoring us as adopted sons and daughters of the Kingdom. By grace, God refuses to leave creation in the pits of this world.

RESPOND

Joseph has a lot of opportunities to lose faith in God. Have you? In what ways has God redeemed you in this world?

PRAY

God of life, may we trust you this season. Create in us a faith that is not dependent upon our situation. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear every story of redemption in our midst. May we praise you for the redemption you have brought in this world, and for all the places that still long for your redemption, we ask that you work quickly. Amen.

SATURDAY, MAY 23

READ

Genesis 42

REFLECT

Joseph's dreams are beginning to be fulfilled. His brothers who sold him into slavery are bowing before him like sheaves of grain. How will Joseph wield his power? Will he punish his brothers? He certainly tests them first. He discovers that his brothers are bound by the power of an unforgiven past, immobilized by guilt, and driven by anxiety. They are harnessed to the past. The guilt of the brothers has an enormous power over them. They are not free enough to have faith that all will be well. Joseph returns their money, but in fear the brothers interpret it as punishment. "What is this that God has done to us?" (v. 28) They attempt now to act with integrity trying to protect their father Jacob and brother Benjamin. But because of their guilt, they only conceive that God is punishing them. Tied to the broken past, they try to preserve their father Jacob. They are forced to treat Jacob as though he were the last generation who must be kept alive and unharmed for perpetuity. They are fated and locked to a past moment. They are not open to any possibility, either as a new gift from God or as a fresh work of Joseph.

RESPOND

In our human rebellion, we, too, can be bound to the past. Whether suffering with unresolved guilt or clinging to the past, we cannot see a new future. The good news of Jesus Christ is that God does not come with condemnation but with salvation ushering in a new creation filled with promise. God bends all to the good.

PRAY

Gracious heavenly Father, forgive us. We have sinned against you and our brothers and sisters. Set us free from a past we cannot change enabling us to participate with your rule of love. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.