

### ***Here Comes This Dreamer!***

The God in the time of the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was still largely an unknown entity. He was known by a name, *El Shaddai*, God Almighty (Gen 35:11), and promise that he would give Abraham a land and a people. But none of that had yet to materialize.

The first indication that this *El Shaddai*, this Promise Maker, had any real power was the rise of Joseph to the rank of Chief of Staff to Pharaoh. This is important because the worth of any God in the ANE was measured on the world stage of power.

Even then, it would be four centuries in slavery before the person of God began to take on any of the more recognizable form that we take for granted – the God of Moses, the law-giver God, the God of the Exodus who defeats Pharaoh sends his people off to a new promised land. Now he is seen to be a God of Power, God Almighty indeed!

Even after ***that*** he is primarily is a God of war, for the Promised Land must be subdued. This is a role that causes us a lot of confusion. It's why the Old Testament is such a difficult book for the Christian to read and interpret. It is so vast in its sweep of history and the slow, incremental revelation of *El Shaddi*.

The judges of the Twelve Tribes, who come after Moses, would arise and rule the land in a loose confederacy for 200 years, before the first king was appointed and monarchy arose.

The personal, loving, gracious God that we see in hindsight, the Jesus who responded to all things with compassion, was slow to reveal himself in history and in hearts. It really did take a thousand generations. What does that teach you about God? About walking with God?

### **In the Text**

***And this is the story of the family of Jacob.*** (Gen 37:1)

You have heard a portion of the story read this morning. Of the twelve sons, Joseph, the youngest, was his father's favourite. Jacob, you may remember, gave him a long-sleeved coat, a token of luxury. Gen 37 tells us his brothers ***hated him***, twice actually, ***and could not speak peaceably to him*** (vv 4,8).

When Joseph sees in his dreams his brothers bowing down to him as sheaves of wheat (vv 6-7), and when the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bow down to him (v 9), they take offence. But God has *revealed a glimpse of the path of history to his dreaming mind*.

Later, as Joseph was going out to the pastures to join his brothers, they saw him from afar. ***They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."*** (Gen 39:19-20)

It goes on to note how after throwing him in a pit for the time being, the brothers sit down for lunch, and Rueben and Judah intercede, 'Let's not just kill him, let's throw him in a well,' hoping

he could come back by to rescue the youngest son of Jacob... but in the meantime his brothers sell him off to a caravan heading off to Egypt. Wherein, he is sold to prominent Egyptian official Potifar, the Captain of Pharaoh's guard.

Can I just mention a couple of ironies? Isn't it ironic that Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, they who will by this act become enslaved in Egypt themselves? Isn't it ironic that they sell Joseph to Ishmaelite traders, the offspring of the sibling rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael, Ishmael being the slave cast out by Sarah. The sons of Isaac sold into slavery by those cast into slavery – and that for a 20 pieces of silver. Sounds familiar from another betrayal I seem to recall?

And Joseph was, above all others in the Bible, a man of dreams. He was a truly remarkable figure who overcame mortal sibling rivalry, the jealousy of Potifar's wife who had him sent to prison when he wouldn't sleep with her, for **...he was handsome and good looking** (Gen 39:6; a real Fabio according to the Pseudepigraphic *Joseph and Aseneth*).

So, Joseph, was languishing in prison for two years, falsely accused for being a Fabio, when Pharaoh had the famous dream of the seven lean cows and seven fat cows that the cupbearer said, 'Hey, I know a guy who can interpret dreams!' And from that point Joseph rose to the height of power in Egypt.

### From the Text

What do we learn from this story, of the many things we could focus on. I've picked two.

Last week we talked about the divine imagination in the feeding of the 5000. Here we find it again operating actively in the person of Joseph. When Joseph gave Pharaoh the interpretation of his dream he said, **It is not I, God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer** (Gen 41:16). The divine imagination comes from God. It wasn't Joseph's powers of interpretation, it was God in him.

It wasn't the disciples' idea to feed the 5000 bread, it was God's idea.

It wasn't Peter's idea to walk on water, it was Jesus casting to him the divine imagination that such a thing was possible. As it happened his courage failed him. But to his credit he got out of the boat.

It wasn't the disciples' idea to leave Jerusalem and take the Gospel to the whole world, it was God's doing. But in each case the disciples caught the divine imagination and acted on it. How would you know if you were seeing God's divine imagination? You'll just know. We, as a church, will just know when God sends the divine imagination upon us.

So it works like this...first, it is God who puts that dream in your heart - **It is not I, God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer** - and then, and here is the rub... it is followed by fourteen years of hard work. Jacob worked 14 years for Rachel, is it a coincidence that, in the light of a dream, Joseph worked 14 years for Pharaoh, 7 lean 7 fat to save the land of Egypt?

Let's just say "fourteen years of hard work" is way to that that those who catch the divine imagination are going **to work** bringing it to pass. Nothing fell into the lap of Jacob or Joseph and nothing falls in the lap of God's people. Because when the divine imagination grips us we are going to get to work. I think a new season of such labour awaits us here at Victoria Nazarene. Although I think our online service crew thinks it is already here.

The divine imagination is all of this, freeing from us our poverty of mind, the enslavement to the merely observable, but it is so much more. It is that crack where the light of heaven gets in, as Leonard Cohen put it. Joseph saw that crack and saw what God had for him.

The second thing is this. The text teaches us that God comes to us in the midst of our human condition.

For example: The family that produced the Twelve Patriarchs was a "blended family." Sound familiar? In fact, it took four women to produce the twelve sons who were the foundation of the promise of Israel. 6 by Leah, 2 by Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin), 2 by Bilhah, and 2 by Zilpah; it was the last four sons who hated Joseph so and wanted to kill Joseph. Oh those wives fought constantly. It was like a reality TV show.

And speaking of families, I was trying to figure a clever way to work this in but I can't so I just have to say how struck I was by the listing of Benjamin's kids in Gen 46:21. Can I share that with you?

***Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim Huppim and Ard.***

If you are in a blended family, I know that there are many attendant difficulties, but I want you to know that God is with you. Just as God was with Jacob and this profoundly dysfunctional blended family, it was, nevertheless, the family through whom God shaped the course of his presence in the world.

We have yet to see any evidence of those saints who we assume are the ones God uses to work his will. No, God uses people just like you and me to do great things in his Kingdom! And we say, 'But...But...But... it can't be me...' and God says, 'Get a little divine imagination folks.' Jesus said, 'You give them something to eat!'

When we get a divine fire in our belly, we still don't know how that is going to work out.

In fact, the Bible tells us that during that era of captivity the promise of God was operating in the background (like that little cycling thing on the computer screen that makes me so nervous) accomplishing the expansion of the population of Abraham's family in way no one would ever have chosen... and by a means completely unexpected. What does that tell you about walking with God?

***... the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them (v 7). And... the more they were oppressed, the more***

***they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.*** (Ex 1: 12)  
God has her ways.

As I close let me call two things to your attention and I hope this lifts your hearts and inspires to engage in divine imagination.

Judah, is actually the brother who prevents Joseph's death by suggesting they sell him to traders rather than kill him, because it is the only way he can save him (Gen 37:26).

You will perhaps recall that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. The family of Jesse, the father of David, of the village of Bethlehem. And that the NT calls Jesus the Lion of Judah (Rev 5:5; see Heb 7:14).

It is from Judah that the Messiah arises. Should you have faith in God today, in the midst of whatever you are experiencing? God's purposes are like a great unstoppable river, they are an ocean, the depth of which cannot be plumbed. Let's walk with God.

And finally this, Jacob says of the remarkable Joseph, whose path led him through many tight, blind corners, from the bottom of a well to the pinnacle of power, to second-in-command for Pharaoh himself, to become the agent of El Shaddai's rise to earthly power.

***26 The blessings of your father  
are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains,  
the bounties of the everlasting hills;  
may they be on the head of Joseph,  
on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.***

And may they be on your today. Thanks be to God. Amen