

Land of Goshen
Genesis 45:1-15
February 20, 2022
First Presbyterian, Luling

Our Genesis reading this morning is toward the end of a very long story. It's a story that starts back in chapter 37 and won't be finished till chapter 50. It's a story full of evil intentions and intrigue and distrust and despair

The story starts several chapters back with the tale that we for some reason think is a good one to teach children in Sunday School. Joseph is the son of Jacob and Rachel, eleventh in a line of twelve brothers. He is the favorite, and everybody knows it. Dad makes sure everyone knows that Joseph is the favorite son of the favorite wife, and Joseph regularly rubs it in to the other brothers. He has special clothes that he flaunts. And he interprets dreams in a way that show how superior he is to his brothers. Brothers number 1 through 10 take matters into their own hands and throw the favorite son into a pit, and tell their father that some wild animal killed him.

We don't get a lot of other information about life for the brothers in Canaan, because the narrative follows Joseph to Egypt. Some slave traders pick him up and he ends up in Egypt. He gets into trouble and ends up in jail in Pharaoh's court. After a while, he does his dream interpretation thing again and gains Pharaoh's favor. To make a long story short, Joseph ends up as Pharaoh's chief of staff, a very powerful figure in a very powerful country.

As our passage this morning opens, God's chosen people in Canaan are in danger. A famine is threatening the entire region. Joseph, thanks to a dream, had predicted the famine, and Egypt has been preparing for seven years. They have grain stored up, enough to feed all of their people and then some.

The rest of Joseph's family is hungry, so Dad Jacob sends sons #1-10 to buy grain in Egypt. Joseph recognizes them, but they do not know who he is. He requires them to leave one brother in his custody and return with the youngest brother Benjamin. They are upset, and attribute this treatment as divine retribution for their treatment of Joseph so many years before. Joseph sees their despair and weeps.

When they return home, it is a replay of so many years before. Their father Jacob is distraught, for his son Simeon has been left in Egypt, he has lost his favorite son so many years before, and he absolutely refuses to let them take son #12, Benjamin, to Egypt. Though the years had passed and the family had

somehow learned to live together, the wounds had never healed and never would completely.

Canaan was a place of painful memories and difficult relationships. Egypt was also a place of painful memories and difficult relationships, since Joseph had grown up away from his family, as a slave and a prisoner. This family has been broken in all ways.

The famine continues, and matters get so desperate that Jacob finally agrees to send Benjamin, along with the other brothers, back to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph is overcome and has to leave the room to weep once again when he sees his little brother Benjamin. Joseph tries to devise a way to keep Benjamin in Egypt. But he breaks down completely when his brother Judah describes the years of anguish that his father has lived through and the complete destruction of his sanity if Benjamin does not return to Canaan with the other brothers.

And, finally, here is where our reading began this morning. A long and twisted story of broken and complicated family relationships comes to a climax. Joseph weeps again, overcome by...what? There are so many possibilities: the magnitude of the wrong his brothers did to him; the magnitude of the pain his own manipulations have caused his father and his brothers; the magnitude of the complications they had all created and the years it would take to undo them.

Finally, Joseph decides to reveal his identity to his stunned brothers. He tells the brothers that they can return home and retrieve the rest of the family and settle in the land of Goshen, a particularly fertile area of Egypt. The land of Goshen is where they will work out, or not work out, the difficulties in their family. In Goshen, the father and brothers will be together, provided for by the generosity of the one they had wronged.

The land of Goshen is far from a perfect, closing scene of a movie reunion of long-lost family members. God has brought the brothers to Goshen, working through the tricks and evil and damaged relationships on all sides. None of the brothers, including Joseph, is without fault. None of the brothers have emerged without hurt. God has brought them here, despite their actions, to work for forgiveness and reconciliation. Goshen is a place where immediate needs are met, freeing up energy and time for working together toward forgiveness and a future together.

I hope the church can be a place like the land of Goshen. A place where people can work together for forgiveness and reconciliation. A place where we can tell the truth and say we're sorry. A place where feelings can be complicated and everyone is working toward peace. A place where we don't pretend like

nothing bad happened, but a place where we also believe that we can move forward together.

Our culture desperately needs a land of Goshen. We, together, need a place where we can meet on a level place, like we talked about last week, see and value each other as human beings, children of God. We need a place where we can talk about the ways we are divided from each other, with honesty and without fear. We need a place for repentance, and forgiveness, and reconciliation. We need a place for healing and a place to look forward to the fulfillment of God's promises.

That land of Goshen sure sounds like it could be the church. How can we be a place for healing, not just healing for individuals, but healing for our communities? How can we be a place where repentance and forgiveness are real and powerful? How can we be a place where a fractured culture can work to put itself back together? This is the church's mission in our time: to be a land of Goshen.