

Today's theme is jealousy. It is the bag we want to set at Jesus' feet and leave it there. It is a good one to close our series with because it can intertwine with, be caused by, and/or cause some of the other emotional baggage we've talked about these last several weeks. Unforgiveness, pride, fear, and jealousy can feed off one another.

Jealousy can infuse our personal relationships, but much of our society and economy is built and designed to promote and be driven by it. Advertising, social media, traditional media, politics, and more. Pitting neighbor against neighbor, group against group to keep us tuned in and scrolling on our computers and smart phones. All so we will see the advertising that keeps us buying more and more.

It's a vicious cycle and a trap. It can be hard to detect when we are in the midst of it and on that merry-go-round.

We are going to hear a story on a personal level where jealousy causes things to get totally out of control. That's one of the things about the Bible. It not only tells us what we should do, but we are given vivid examples of what NOT to do, and yet, even when people mess up big time God still does not abandon them.

So, we are going back to Genesis 37:3-28. It is the beginning of the story of Joseph and his Technicolor Dream Coat. It is the place where jealousy is born and through unforgiveness, pride, and fear, his brothers get so stirred up that they feel justified in doing the unthinkable. Hear the word of the Lord.

3 Now Israel [or Jacob] loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”

8 His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, 13 and Israel said to Joseph, “As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.”

“Very well,” he replied.

14 So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.” Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, 15 a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, “What are you looking for?”

16 He replied, “I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?”

17 “They have moved on from here,” the man answered. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’”

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. 18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

19 “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. 20 “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”

21 When Reuben heard this [the eldest], he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. 22 “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

**The word of life.
Thanks be to God!**

On Father's Day, we have a terrible example of a father. Don't be like Jacob.

It's easy to see this as a very simple story:

- Jacob plays favorites with his children ... in a very obvious way.

- Joseph is a jerk about it.
- The other brothers have had enough and make a rash decision and do something terrible to end the dream ... but unknowingly help it to continue.

Spoiler Alert: By Joseph going to Egypt, he is able to save his entire family and relocate them to Egypt during a famine.

It could be easy to draw those clear broad lines. It would be simpler to interpret the story, but it wouldn't be helpful to us because life is rarely that simple, and the story itself is more complicated.

What we have is a picture of what jealousy sets in motion. Hatred born of jealousy. A jealousy like this can start small, but it can be nurtured and grow. It can feel justified. *I have the **right** to be jealous because the situation is not fair.* In this case it is NOT fair.

You can say that Joseph didn't help the situation because of what he said and did, but we are looking at a small sliver of time. Verse 4 tells us that the brothers "could not speak a kind word to him." Joseph being the youngest brother at the time, the favorite of Jacob as long as he can remember through no fault of his own. He was likely ostracized by his brothers long before today's passage. Perhaps his attitude was due to *his* jealousy of exclusion from the relationship and camaraderie among the other brothers. How might that circumstance affect you?

What are the different causes of jealousy? We can see multiples in today's story. There can be dissatisfaction or disappointment with ourselves and where we are ... in our circumstances, in our lives, in our relationships with others. Seeing someone else where we'd like to be, where we hoped to be. This, of course, can happen so easily in family situations among siblings and other relatives, but it can be anywhere. Especially when we feel vulnerable. Comparing ourselves with others.

Comparing is futile because we are all so different. Let's forget how we can look at others from the outside and think that they have everything together, everything we wish we were or wish we had, and have no idea about what is going on behind the scenes, behind closed doors.

Pastor Andy Stanley talks about the envy people feel by looking at things like Facebook. People looking at the posts from all the people they're connected with and how great their lives look. You have to understand that you're looking at their highlight reel. You're not seeing pictures of how they smashed their thumb with a hammer (either figuratively or literally).

And also, because we're different, we're gifted in different ways. We're meant to serve in different ways, and it is because of those differences that we are able to be successful together. We need each other and our differences. It really makes us better. It's like the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, "*24b God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*"

But if jealousy gets firmly entrenched, it can get very nasty. The Bible is full of examples. Joseph and his brothers are only one. There's Cain and Abel, Hannah and Peninnah, King Saul and David, and the list goes on. There's even infighting among the disciples like James and John asking to be on Jesus' right and left sides in the Kingdom, thinking of those as places of honor and power. With the possible exception of James and John, all of these examples lead to greater and greater pain, often leading to other terrible things like murder and attempted murder. There certainly broken relationships, not just between them but affecting all the people in their lives.

The pain helps them ... and us ... rationalize their behavior. In this case, the brothers say, *We're justified because Joseph's a jerk*. Then, they have second thoughts about killing him. *We'll just sell him into slavery*. Like that's so much better. They can go home feeling satisfied. *Well, at least we didn't kill him*. But, Have you ever used as similar rationalization for something you knew was wrong ... *At least I didn't _____*. It's so easy to do, to say that, but not so fast.

I saw a post this week that captured my attention. I even posted it on the church's Facebook page. You may have seen it. Charles Spurgeon says, "Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right." But another important thing to recognize is when both options are **wrong**.

Well, at least we didn't kill him. No, they just destroyed their father by breaking his heart. I don't think that they wound up having the close relationship they had hoped with their father after getting rid of Joseph.

All of this is a microcosm of what is happening in our society, and has been for a long time. It's pointless to play the blame game about who started it, whose behavior is just as bad or worse. This is where we pit one group against another, or we might pick a particular person to represent that group. *They* want to take your place. You've been denied your rightful place by *them*. Dehumanizing the other because of ... jealousy. The hate that is created due to jealousy and fear. That leads to a scary place, the justification of violence and abuse, physical or emotional, to end dreams.

There is a plaque outside the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN. This is where Martin Luther King was shot and killed. It is now a civil rights museum. It says, "Here comes that dreamer ... Let's kill him, ... and see what comes of his dreams."

Jealousy can lead people to use violence as a way of shutting down dreams, shutting down a certain hope for the future.

Jealousy of displacement. Jealousy of change. Jealousy of the dreams of people, of black people, but not just black people. People of all races and backgrounds joined Martin Luther King's dream. It's my dream too. It was a dream that I thought not so long ago that we were much closer to achieving. It sickens me to see how much we as a society have backtracked, or realizing that it was always there but hidden and now resurfaced.

In today's story, these brothers feel displaced, threatened, due to their jealousy. Their long nurtured jealousy. When they see Joseph in the distance, their first idea is to kill him. This is what jealousy can do to us if we allow it to take hold and become embedded in us.

How can we change that? It starts in here. Inside us. Paul tells us beginning in 1 Corinthians 12:31, *"I will show you a still more excellent way."* That is the way of love.

He goes on to write in chapter 13:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

None of this means that being slighted, feeling like the situation or the system isn't fair, doesn't hurt, isn't wrong. The hard part is that you are probably right. It doesn't mean that it shouldn't be addressed in a productive life-giving and loving way.

When you feel those stabs of pain. When you feel the anger rising as a result, see it for what it is. Let it go. Leave the baggage of jealousy and all the rest behind. Leave it at the feet of Jesus. Know that you are loved by the One who is LOVE.

One of my favorite quotes is from Saint Augustine. "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."

So what is there to be jealous of really? That doesn't mean that unfairness and injustice don't exist. They do. But the knowledge and assurance of the special love of God for us can empower us to carry on.

Thank you, God, for loving us!

Amen!