

READ

Genesis 42

REFLECT

The famine, which Joseph had prepared Egypt for following Pharaoh's dream, was affecting people all over the region, including his family back in Canaan. Jacob heard that Egypt had grain for purchase, so he sent his 10 eldest sons to purchase as much as they could, a journey of over 300 miles each way through desert – they were clearly desperate for food. When they arrived in Egypt, it just so happened that it was Joseph that met them to sell grain. Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize him, and Joseph used that to his advantage to extract a little revenge. He claimed that they were spies and said that they wouldn't be allowed to leave Egypt until the youngest brother also arrived to prove who they really were. First he said that one would make the journey back to Canaan, but after three days in prison, he allowed 9 to go with one remaining. In those anxiety filled days, the brothers recalled what they had done to Joseph and believed they were finally getting their due for mistreating him - a sign that they had finally begun to repent (which Joseph also recognized). Joseph took Simeon as the brother for collateral, tied him up, and sent the 9 remaining off. Joseph also ordered that their bags should be filled with grain and whatever else they needed for the trip, along with the silver they had used to pay for the grain to begin with. After a day of travel they stopped to rest, and only then did they discover that their silver was there and they immediately knew something bad was coming and they continued to believe it was punishment for their actions toward Joseph. When they arrived at their home, they told their dad everything. Jacob was beside himself with grief and thought all his sons would soon be taken from him. But left without any choice, he told them to go back to Egypt with Benjamin, and if anything were to happen to him, he'd die from his grief. Joseph's plan was to see his family once and know that they regretted their behavior. He didn't know Jacob was still alive and it's doubtful that he meant to cause this much pain to his elderly father, still, he knew his brothers would be in a panic, and that was a pain he did want to cause.

REACT

- The oldest 10 of Jacob's sons traveled hundreds of miles to purchase food, a dangerous, but necessary, trip. Have you ever been driven to go long distances for an item you needed? Recently, during a formula shortage, there were reports of parents driving hundreds of miles to buy their baby's formula. How might you have reacted?
- When Joseph noticed his brothers it's hard to imagine how he would have felt – relief that they were alive, anger at what they'd done to him, like he wanted revenge? Whatever emotions he felt, he quickly devised a plan, one that extracted a certain amount of emotional revenge. Have you ever been face to face with someone who did harm to you after the fact? How did you react, and how did you want to react?
- Joseph's brothers were deeply fearful that the bad actions of their past were finally going to catch up to them and they'd suffer terribly. We all have felt the weight of guilt as it eats away at us. How have you responded to times your guilt got the better of you? Has coming clean helped clear your conscience, even if telling the truth made you have a lot to deal with later on?

RESPOND

A Liturgy for Embracing Joy and Sorrow: Guilt, sorrow, anger, and more are infused in this story, emotions we all too frequently suffer, too. You're invited to engage in a personal liturgy to help God guide you to embrace both the joy and sorrow we find in life:

Do not be distant, O Lord, lest I find my burdens too heavy and shrink from the necessary experience of my grief. Do not be distant, O Lord, lest I become so mired in yesterday's hurts that I miss the gifts this day might hold. Let me neither ignore my pain, pretending all is okay when it isn't, nor coddle and magnify my pain so that I dull my capacity to experience all the remains good in this life. Joy that denies sorrow is neither hard-won, nor true, nor eternal.

And sorrow that refuses to make space for the return of joy and hope becomes nothing more than a temple for the worship of my own woundedness. Give me strength, O God, to feel my grief deeply and strength to remain open to surprising encounters with joy. Amen.