

READ

Genesis 43

REFLECT

So much of Genesis is about trust – who’s willing to trust in God’s promises and who isn’t. When Jacob’s family ran out of food once again, they had a decision to make, one that was built entirely on whether they (but mostly Jacob) could trust in what God had promised them. Should they go back to Egypt and trust that Benjamin and the rest of the children would be safe, or should they risk everyone dying of hunger? The answer of what to do was obvious, but Jacob made his sons take gifts, including the silver that had been returned to them on the first voyage. Even though Jacob had seen God’s promise come true on so many occasions, he was still resorting to bribery in order to protect his family. As they arrived in Egypt, Joseph noticed that Benjamin was with them and so he planned a feast for them. When the other brothers were told that Joseph wanted to see them, they feared for their lives, assuming he meant to do them harm. They tried to tell Joseph’s household manager about the silver they’d used to pay for the grain before, but he said that he’d received their payment so whatever they found must have been a gift from God. They were given a warm welcome in Joseph’s house, but still they prepared the bribe they’d brought with them. When they saw Joseph and offered him the gift, instead of taking it he bowed to them and then asked about Jacob’s health (though he was still hiding his identity from them, so he did not call him by name). After hearing that he was still alive, and then seeing Benjamin, he was so overwhelmed with emotion he had to leave the room lest they see him weeping. After he pulled himself together, they, and all of Joseph’s household, began to feast – though the brothers had to sit at their own table (arranged in birth order) because Egyptians wouldn’t eat with Hebrews (Joseph, too, sat at his own table, a clue – if they’d have noticed it – that Joseph wasn’t an Egyptian). They were all given food, but Benjamin, the only brother who hadn’t conspired against Joseph all those years ago, was given five times more food. It could have been a test – would the brothers react to favoritism shown Benjamin? In the end, none of the bad things they’d expected happened – yet again God’s promises remained intact.

REACT

- Fear very frequently changes the response we might otherwise have in any other situation. Jacob had been given so many signs that God would be with him and that he'd flourish, yet he struggled to believe. When has fear changed how you perceived what you know to be true?
- When the brothers were called before Joseph, they were sure something bad was going to happen. When it didn't, and instead they were invited to a feast, you can assume they were gob smacked. When you've expected the worse and were met with something else, how did you react?
- Joseph gave Benjamin a much larger share of food than the other brothers. When other get more than you, how does it make you feel? Are you envious? Would you get angry? Why or why not?

RESPOND

Encouragement to trust: Jacob met God face to face, received a blessing, and still struggled to trust in God's promises. What makes us think we're any stronger or better? It takes a lot of work to build our capacity to trust, especially when our instincts tell us not to. But it's work worth putting in, because a life that really trusts in God's love is worth seeking. Mr. Rogers taught so many of us throughout many generations. His words on what it takes for things to happen are wise, and worth our remembering, because building trust isn't magic. It takes years, even a lifetime, of work.

“Imagining something may be the first step in making it happen, but it takes the real time and real efforts of real people to learn things, make things, turn thoughts into deeds or visions into inventions.”

Fred Rogers