

READ

Genesis 44

REFLECT

Jacob was known as the trickster – he had bought his brother’s birthright for a bowl of stew and stole his blessing by dressing up in goat skin – but Joseph played even more tricks on his brothers. For the second time he planted silver in his brother’s sacks to make it seem like they were stealing grain, and then he also planted his cup in Benjamin’s bag. The brothers were sent off loaded with grain, probably very glad to be going home after so much trouble in Egypt, but not too long after they left, Joseph’s household manager caught up to them and charged them with theft. Incredulous at the accusation because they knew they hadn’t stolen anything, they suggested that whoever was caught with the cup could be put to death by Joseph and the rest would be his slaves. It’s the kind of bet you make only when you’re sure that the odds are squarely in your favor, but it’s also the perfect scenario for trickery to change those odds. The cup was found, of course, in the one bag where it was least expected and for the person they could least afford to lose – Benjamin, the youngest and the one whose life they knew they had to protect if they weren’t going to kill their father with a broken heart. They returned to the city in a state of shock – how were they going to save their brother’s life? Judah did some of his own trickery in how he talked to Joseph – notice that he tried to sweep the original agreement under the rug. Instead of putting Benjamin to death, Judah said they would all serve as slaves, including Benjamin. It was a clever trick and Joseph bought it – but he said that all the brothers except Benjamin could leave, only he would be a slave. But that created its own issue, they couldn’t return home to tell their dad that Benjamin would never return. Judah began to beg Joseph, telling him exactly what would happen if they returned to their home without Benjamin; Jacob would die from grief, then he’d die, too, from his own grief. Judah had guaranteed his brother’s safety, so returning without him would mean he had gone back on his word. He offered himself instead of Benjamin for that reason – he had promised Benjamin would be kept safe, so he’d even put his own life on the line to keep that promise.

REACT

- Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did you react to the accusation? Were you given the opportunity to clear your name? What about the flip side – have you ever accused someone else of something they didn't do? Have you always listened to the evidence to prove their innocence?
- How many times have we been so certain of something that we say something like, "I'd bet my life on it"? Usually our lives aren't actually at stake, but what if they were? Would you be so willing to make a bet knowing you might die, even if you were 100%?
- Judah offered himself in Benjamin's place in order to keep his promise to his father. How far have you been willing to go to fulfill a promise? Have promises been made to you that went unfulfilled because the other person wasn't willing to do something extra to fulfill it? How has that affected you?

RESPOND

Prayer of Self-Giving: *Judah was willing to give himself entirely to protect his brother. We're often reminded that our faith takes much more than we readily want to give – it takes our whole lives. St. Francis of Assisi penned the following prayer to help us focus on God's call in our lives, as well as remind us what God has done to fulfill God's promises to us. Pray it this week:*

I beg you, Lord, let the fiery, gentle power of your love take possession of my soul, and snatch it away from everything under heaven, that I may die for love of your love as you saw fit to die for love of mine. Amen.