

August 20, 2017,  
The eve of the Solar Eclipse  
Terry Overfelt  
Broadway Christian Church  
Moment of Grace  
Genesis 45:1-15

I dreamed on Sunday night that there was a baby in our midst. If I did not know that Hillary and Derek are expecting a girl, I would be sure that this vivid dream was a premonition of a son to be born to them, to us. But he is someone else. The dream was set in the stony darkness of a mansion that felt like a home but seemed to be church, since some of you were there. At one point we were gathered around the table and the baby seemed stoic, uninvolved, almost ignored. Then, as dreams jump, we were pushing a grand piano with our backsides so we could stand in front of it and sing. The baby was asleep. I kept leaving the singers, going to wake the baby to try and get him to smile, I was afraid if he was able to sleep so long and not be made to smile, he would not know joy.

This was my dream in the darkness of this troubling week.

Joseph, in today's scripture is a dreamer too. His is an important story that lasts the last 13 chapters of Genesis and is also found in the Judaic Torah and the Islamic Qur'an.

It is a story of God's will working out even in the gravest of human interference.

It is the story that inspired the conversion of Cat Stevens to knowing God within us and trading his life of musical, Moonshadow fame for a life devoted to human and spiritual rights.

He became a devout Muslim, taking Joseph's name, Yusef Islam.

Joseph comes from a long line of visionaries who have a family trait of dangerous favoritism. As a church, have visited these stories all summer.

First was Joseph's Great-Grandfather, Abraham who **avored** Isaac over Ishmael and sent this son and his Egyptian slave-mother away. Gone are the ones deemed only half of the Abrahamic, pure, **bloodline**. How can you raise up a great nation if there are impurities in the genealogy?

**Have you heard of such a thing?**

This judgment and casting out built three faiths and nations whose flags still compete for subjugating wave over the Holy Lands of Abraham's descendants; The Jews, the Muslims and the Christians.

Next, Isaac, Joseph's grandfather had a **avored** son too; the first born of his twin sons with the cultural reverence that put one above another because of birthright **supremacy**.

**Have you heard of such a thing?**

Isaac's wife Rebekah countered this by her favoring the other twin, Jacob; pitting these boys in competition, deception, jealousy, resentment and even

murderous threats for most of their lives.

Then, Joseph's father, Jacob, should have learned from the suffering and striving bred in favoring but he could not seem to help himself. He **avored** one wife, and subsequently her two sons above the other ten. And since the son Joseph was 15 years older than his baby brother of the same mother, the father Jacob had established Joseph as the favorite and indulged him with **privilege** and gifts that Joseph gladly lived into and even flaunted before the other brothers, somehow believing himself more worthy.

**Have you heard of such a thing?**  
Favoritism?

It goes back as far as the first Biblical brothers, where God is said to have favored Abel's offering of the firstling lamb to Cain's first fruits. So, I'm thinking, God? Favoring? Then the favoring must not be the sin. God liking lamb more than pomegranates is not the offense. We all have favorite leanings.

The problem is **our response** of jealousy, envy, obsession, our fallen countenance, our anger and it is here that God says in Genesis 4 that ...“sin is lurking, at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Cain cannot master it, and Abel’s blood cries to God from the ground.

Joseph’s brothers are not capable of this sin-mastering either.

It gets worse.

Joseph is given a much nicer coat than his brothers.

He struts it.

Joseph not only lives but dreams of his one-upmanship of doing, saying and having more.

He tells his brothers that his dreams reveal their eleven sheaves of wheat bowing down to his upright one.

They hated him.

He couldn’t wait to share his second dream that the sun, moon and eleven stars were also bowing down to him.

Wait a minute,

now even his father Jacob recognizes himself in this dream; he is the sun and the moon is his wife, and they are all to bow to the ground to Joseph? Jacob had to think about his parenting.

We got one of the most wonderful pieces of parenting advice from my mother who stayed with us a week when Hillary was born.

Dustin was not yet two.

Regularly he was running to my mother but as she opened her arms he’d say,

“No, Grandma hold Hooey.”

Here was her golden advice.

“The baby only needs to hear your voice, so as you talk to her, tell her how wonderful her big brother is.”

Dustin was delighted and listening and this made him rise to these descriptions and love to *talk* with his new sister.

Two summers later, we were playing on the dock.

Dustin took something from Hillary and as she started to

protest I heard him say something like, “Because I’m wonderful.” We did an about face to carefully maneuver the slippery slope of self-esteem sliding into over developed ego.

At 17, Joseph’s ego seemed out of control. As he was sent to spy on his brothers and tattle back to his father, his brothers saw him coming. They’d had enough. The oldest, Ruben convinced the others not to shed his blood, but to throw him in a pit where he could double back and rescue him. Meanwhile, here came Ishmaelite traders and the brothers instead sold Joseph. Selling a brother into slavery?

### **Have you heard of such a thing?**

Jacob entered into a dark situation from pit to slavery in Egypt. But the word says, “The Lord was with him,” in spite of heinous human interference. And it got better, his master really appreciated his skill and made him overseer of his house. And it got worse, Joseph thwarts

the advances of his master’s wife and in her spurn, she falsely accuses him of insulting her. Joseph is put into prison but the word says again, “The Lord was with him.” In his shared cell, Joseph uses his dreaming experience to correctly interpret the dreams of other prisoners for better and worse.

Meanwhile, the Pharaoh of Egypt is having crazy dreams. He hears of Jacob’s interpreting ability and summons him out of chains. First, Joseph gives advance credit of discerning the dream to God and then listens. Jacob says Pharaoh’s dream means there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in Egypt and beyond.

Because Pharaoh recognizes that Joseph has “The spirit of God.” He advances him to be his right hand man to manage the next 14 years.

Three things just happened; Joseph gave the credit to God in advance, God empowered Joseph and Pharaoh saw God in Joseph.

This is a blessing- filled moment; praise, power and witness; we call that God's grace.

Fast Forward into the years of the famine, Jacob is now in his thirties. Jacob's brothers, who are starving, are coming now to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognizes them, but they do not recognize what they don't perceive as possible.

I wish I could tell you the reunion was joyous! But here Jacob's ego, or vengeance, or shock, or woundedness or hate...enters in and it looks like arrogance. He toys with his brothers for 99 verses. He frames them as thieves to manipulate their bringing back his favorite same mother- brother, Benjamin.

But then Joseph sees his hateful brothers now guarding Benjamin and their father Jacob's heart. Keeping anything from happening to this last child of Rachel, Jacob's favorite. Something has shifted in the brothers. In these umpteen

years since they sold Joseph, watched their father's heart break and tried to live with their own dark betrayal, they have changed. It no longer matters to them that their father has favorites, they are protecting this brother and their father from their further heartbreak; sin is at the door and they are mastering it.

Then something extraordinary happens to Joseph too. Barbara Brown Taylor might describe it by her love of moonlight faith, when, in the darkness, the ever phasing moon, full of wax and wane, lights this night in a variance of perception that the constant sun cannot offer the day. This moment of heat and drought is eclipsed by the cooling welcome of a covering moonbeam moment of grace.

When Joseph beholds this, he weeps in the realization that God has indeed sent him, out of the darkness and into the land of Egypt, even as a slave, to preserve for the children of Abraham, a remnant on earth, a promise is a promise.

God fills both sides with a stunning moment of grace. The kind of grace that Jacob and his brother Esau received a generation ago. The kind that has brothers falling upon each other's necks, weeping and kissing.

God dwells, even now, with the promised children of Abraham, because the Divine is all about keeping God's word.

Diverse **bloodlines** will each thrive,

birthright **supremacy** will prove unimpressive in the balance of blessedness,

and as for **privilege**, it will be eclipsed by God's goodness; delivering a widespread recovery to individuals, families and even nations because of the cooling shadows cast in the moonlit dark in the heat of day.

I dreamed there was a baby in our midst.

It is Christ, it is Joseph, it is you, all brothers, all sisters.

When we come to the table, the baby, the embodiment of God and love is to be wakened and made to smile by us, that God will know we are not unengaged at this table, we are not stoic, uninvolved or to be ignored, we come to this table and to this life to know and bring joy.

We will push back the grand distractions and use our voices to bring the song of the moon eclipsing the heat and casting long shadows of hope.

We're being followed by a moonshadow, moonshadow, moonshadow.

Tomorrow, at 1:12 pause in a blessing filled moment of praise, power and witness; we call that grace.

**Have you heard of such a thing?**