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Scripture

Genesis 37:1-11

¹ Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. ² This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

⁵ Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. ⁷ There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

⁹ He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" ¹¹ So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Devotional

It's almost impossible to read this passage without hearing the score from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. But once you shake the music from your mind and get past the reality that the coat is not technicolored, nor any particular color at all, but merely "a long robe with sleeves," you can think anew about what it represents.

Designed to delight and to conceal and to protect, that coat instead arouses envy, exposes innocence, and threatens danger. Joseph, coat on his shoulders, can't resist telling his brothers about the dreams portraying a destiny for him which far outshines their own. He has no inkling that his coat and his dreams will ignite jealousy and propel him into circumstances which threaten his security and even his existence.

As we plunge into our Lenten pilgrimage, we might remember Joseph's journey, from favored son to slave to prisoner to gifted advisor to triumphant rescuer of his people. When we first set out, wearing beautiful coats and dreaming about our own ideas of success, challenges which threaten to overwhelm us may await. And yet, God is preparing us with precisely the gifts needed to fulfill dreams and serve others in ways and circumstances we are not yet capable of imagining.

Prayer

Gracious God, as we move into the Lenten season, we know that surprises may lie in store for us. Guide us, we pray, through even the harshest of circumstances, so that we might discover the ways in which you call us to serve your people. Amen.