

## **Genesis 37:1-11**

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. 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. 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. 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.

Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream that I dreamed. 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.' 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.

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.' 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?' So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

## **Matthew 3:13-17**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

### **"How Many Colors In Your Coat?"**

**Rev. Charles Schuster**

**January 13, 2008**

I guess while I was gone we got another stained glass window put in at the east entrance. Rev. Greg Dawson who has built the other windows for us has put another one in. I confess that I have walked past it for the past week and did not notice, but it's the burning bush, it's the stained glass window that's the burning bush. He has made a very beautiful space for us, and we're grateful, especially if we're observant.

Did you get a coat for Christmas? Did you get a coat? A coat of many colors. I want to do a series on Joseph since at the Carousel Dinner Theater they're doing *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*. It's a great opera, Andrew Lloyd Webber. Joseph received a

coat from his father because Joseph was his father's favorite. Isn't it wonderful to have the idea that among all the people, you're the favorite one? From your mother or your father or even God, you're the favored one? Joseph was the favored son. Jesus was too, because after he was baptized those words were clear and many heard them, and Matthew heard about them, and so Matthew wrote them down many years later. And so Jesus was baptized, and as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened up and the spirit of God descended upon him and a voice from Heaven, *the* voice from Heaven was heard to say, "This is my own dear son, and I am pleased with him." Wow. Did you get a coat for Christmas? Did you hear words that were spoken of you – "This is my child, my own dear child, and I am so pleased" – God saying that of you? Are you the favored child? Are you the second child? The middle child? Are you the associate pastor? The only way I really understand that is, I was once. They have issues, not Ray and David. I get all kinds of flack from Joel and Pam, and I should. Are you next in line to be promoted, knowing that the promotion is going to come to someone else, and it will never happen? Are you the sibling who has to continue, whatever your age, to listen to your brother or your sister say, "Mama loved me best."? Or as the bumper sticker was outside the church, and I've mentioned this before, that said "Jesus loves you, but he loves me better."?

Did you get a coat for Christmas? Did you get a coat of many colors? And if you didn't get a coat of many colors, if you don't think you're the favored one, maybe what you got was a hat. Did you get a hat like I got for Christmas? I got a hat this year for Christmas. Other years, I've gotten hats, but family members who gave me the hats I've gotten other years misjudged the size and it came down over my ears. They thought my head was bigger than it actually is. I know. One year I got a hat and it fit, but I can't wear it because when I put it on, I look like Vice President Cheney. And that's not appropriate for a Democrat, do you think? This year I got a hat that looks like the one Harrison Ford wears in *Indiana Jones*. I got the hat, and when I wear it, it makes me drive a little faster to get to where I want to go. That hat gets me started. It does. I think we all need something like that in our lives, something that tells us to stand up and get started. Something that shows us what we can do and invites us to get on with it.

Karen Armstrong, there was someone who said something to her one time that got her started. His name was Joseph Campbell, and Karen Armstrong that great writer of world religions, she heard Joseph Campbell say "Follow your bliss." "Karen, child, follow your bliss." It got her started. Karen got a hat in a way. She was not favored. Seventeen years old, she was religious – her family thought too religious, and in order to show them she was somebody, she joined a convent. She said it helped her face the confusion of her adolescent self, and the infinite and satisfying mystery that is God, and those were hard, unhappy years, and finally she left. She failed convent, decided to study English literature at Oxford. She wrote papers. She sat for exams. They told her, "You're no scholar." She flunked out of school. She was kicked out of the convent, and she flunked out of school. And how did she feel? She would say it this way: "I was a stranger and a foreigner. I remained on the periphery. But I recalled those words of Joseph Campbell who said, "We've got to follow our bliss." We have to find something, a challenge that involves us, that entralls us, and even if it seems hopelessly unfashionable and unproductive, we

have to throw ourselves into it, we have to do that heart and soul. “So I spent my days in silence, almost wholly occupied now in writing and thinking and speaking about God and spirituality.” Karen Armstrong got started. It’s in her book, *The Spiral Staircase*. It led to a life following her bliss as she tries to help Christians and Jews and Muslims realize that in a real basic sense, we have the same God and we could get along if only we would. She followed her bliss. Joseph Campbell got her started.

Was it Joseph also for Jesus? Was it his father who got him started, who taught him how to hammer and how to chisel, who worked with him in a trade, who let him know to follow his bliss? Did he get a hat for Christmas from Joseph his father, or a coat of many colors? Was he a favored one? Are you? Did you get a hat, something to get you started? If not a hat, or a coat of many colors, if you’re not feeling like the favorite child, maybe you got a non-contact thermometer for Christmas, like I did. A non-contact thermometer is this device that can tell the temperature wherever you are, and since it’s been cold, it helps me find out where something’s warm. I move around with the thing in the house. When you push a button, it tells you the temperature. Do you know, the temperature changes in the same room? It does. I’ve been all over this church. You wouldn’t believe the temperature differentiation in this church. I walk through my neighborhood and I point the thing at a house. It’s a laser thing. I can tell which houses on our block are hot. And some of them are Methodists. Keeps me moving forward in the snow as it’s falling, looking for warmth. I can measure the members of the congregation. I have it in my pocket. I can aim the thing and I can tell who’s hot and who’s not, out there. I can measure the hot air that you say comes out of the pulpit. I’m thinking of doing a test on all five of our preachers, see which of us has the hottest sermon.

Last week, Saturday, I attended a meeting of General Conference delegates. The General Conference, I call it the General Conference Dereliction, but it’s the Delegation, and we’re meeting over there. I found out something. Those of us who are going to General Conference, there are six of us from this area, you know where they have us sitting? They have us sitting, a thousand people and we’re sitting – this is so cool – right beside the people from Angola. There is a God. I mean, what a wonderful thing. Bishop Brown was at the meeting yesterday, and he was saying that the church is in deep trouble, and he’s very worried. Friday I was invited to attend a meeting with the President of Iliff, and he says he thinks we’re living in a post-modern, no, post-Christian, no, post-religious age. David Trickett is worried. The world is cold, and I thought, “Those boys need a Gospel warming detector. Those boys need something in a cold world. They need a device that lets them know where there’s warmth, the warmth of the Gospel. We all need something that tells us to keep going with hope and don’t look back.

This past December, one of the people who came to worship here came up to me after the service. He’s a pastor in the New England Conference, United Methodist Church. He said, “You now, back where I am, the churches are dead.” He said, “This place isn’t.” He says probably because of the pastors. I said, “It’s in spite of us. This place is alive.” A Gospel warming detector can help us amid the bad news to know that the bad news is not the last news we hear. Keep going, and don’t look back. We all need a Gospel warming detector in the cold world like this.

You may have heard of Mary Ann Pearl. She was pregnant with her first child when she received the news about her husband Daniel. The year was 2003. Daniel was a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*. He was stationed in Pakistan, he was kidnapped and brutally murdered by religious extremists who though he was working for the CIA. He was Jewish, actually he was a citizen of the world who spoke several languages, was a man who was full of life and wisdom and fun. Mary Ann's father had been an idealist and had become disillusioned by the hatred in the world and he committed suicide, he just couldn't take the coldness of the world. And her mother was a heat-seeker who believed in humankind, and with bitterness and disillusionment about to overtake her, Mary Ann needed to do something to keep her going and not look back, to find hope in the world. She could have listened to the voices that define the world as divided between enemy and friend, she could have given in to the coldness of the world, but to keep herself going she determined that she would look for warmth and the human spirit. She says it this way: "When confronted with the seemingly endless headlines about everything that's going on in the world, there's the feeling that it just makes the heart crack open, and in the cracks that occur in the heart that's cracked open by despair, therein lies the fear. And that distorts our perceptions of the world and our relationships with each other and the values that are essential to our integrity, and our values remain hostage to that kind of empty rhetoric," she said. "So I embarked on a journey in search of warmth. Only human beings can undo what humans have created I decided if those who killed my husband were determined to show the gruesomeness of humanity, I would do everything I could to display its integrity, its beauty and its resilience, and I wanted to do something that would allow my son to embrace the world. There has to be some way Adam could genuinely feel hopeful and not frightened by life."

So Mary Ann Pearl followed the warmth of the human heart and the light, and she found the warmth. All over the world, one of the places was in the brothels of Vietnam. Children of prostitutes, and this wonderful woman, who was taking care of them and trying to save them. She went to Uganda, and she found a young doctor who was working to do everything he could to save people from the pandemic of AIDS. All over the world she met people who were standing right there in the darkness but bringing light, who were confronting the coldness of life with the warmth of human love. It's all in her book. The book is entitled *In Search of Hope*. I think it was Mary, Jesus' mother, who was the heat-seeker for him. I think that because I listened to Pam Everhart's sermon. Mary knew what was going to happen in his life. She knew the dangers, the risks. I think it was Mary who said, "Keep going, Son, don't look back." At the wedding at Cana she said to him, "Turn the water into wine." She said, "Son, turn fear into love. Son, turn despair into hope. You do it, Son, and you keep going, and you don't look back. Face down the cold world with the warmth of God's love. Confront the cynics who say, "Well, what do you expect?" and tell them if things aren't as they should be, you and I are put here to make things as they could be, and to know if it isn't what it could be, we can keep on working till it is."

You didn't get a coat of many colors? Maybe you got a hat to get you started or a heat-seeking thermometer to keep you going and don't look back. Or maybe you got

something to tell you you arrived. You may not feel like a favorite child, but every now and then it's good to know you've arrived. We've got on of these devices that tells you where you are, and you put in where you want to go, and there's a map and a voice, and it'll tell you. Turn right, turn left. It'll tell you if you get off track, recalculating your route, in other words, meditating. And if you get really off, it'll say, "As soon as possible, safely make a U-turn." In other words, "Repent." But what I really like to hear with this GPS system is when you get to your destination. When you get to your destination it says, "You have arrived." In other words, salvation. It's theological. It tells you you've done well, and we all need someone to tell us that. We all, on occasion, need words of affirmation, even if we're not the favored one.

Wayne would be one you would least expect to be a person who could help anybody find their ultimate destination. Wayne has become a destination finder for all kinds of men and women who are not favored in their own minds. When he was two his mother was left to take care of Wayne and his two brothers. Two years old. His father wanted nothing to do with them and so he walked out on them. He paid no child support, he didn't even call to see how they were doing. He just walked out and never looked back. They lived in a tiny house in Detroit. It was 1940, the country was in a mild depression, but there was no help, no government programs to lend support for this family. His mother worked as a candy girl in a dime store. She was a secretary for Chrysler, she earned \$17 a week and that wasn't enough so she took in laundry, but that wasn't enough, so Wayne was put in a foster home supported by the Methodist church. His mother worked and worked very hard, and then got the family back together. Wayne was no favorite child. He was abandoned, but his mother got them all together again and told them they were special. His mother kept reminding him of his ultimate calling. Wayne Dyer tells it all in his book *Inspiration*, that our job is to take the struggles we have and to connect them to the creative spirit. Our job is to hear the challenges of God and to work to be more like God, he says. Our job is to be an inspiration. Inspiration is our ultimate calling, he says. Wayne Dyer. Our job is to understand and accept that all the things that show up in our lives are there because we've attracted them, and there's a voice in the universe entreating us to remember our purpose, a voice that whispers and sometime it shouts, but most often it sings. A voice that belongs to inspiration. Inspiration is within each and every one of us. Our ultimate calling is to be inspirited, to be an inspiration, and every day we are an inspiration, to know as we are an inspiration we have in one way or another, we have arrived. Our job is to understand that the greatest danger in life is not to set our aim too high and fall short. The greatest danger in our life is to set our aim too low, and then achieve it, and never know what we could have done. It was Wayne Dyer's mother, though, he calls her his hero. She was the one who told him that he had arrived. She taught him to tell people that they could arrive. Do you hear a voice that tells you you've arrived, every now and then?

Joseph had a coat of many colors. He was a favorite child. Most of us are like his brothers, and sometimes we don't feel so favored, but there are people in our lives who tell us, and we hear them They say to us, it's started. Follow your bliss. They say to us, keep going, look for hope and warmth and don't look back, and they tell us, some day you will arrive. And then we will have heard *the* voice of all, saying to us, "This is my

own dear child, and I am proud.” Get started, keep going, don’t look back, arrive. You know it’s true, you are favored by God no matter what color the coat you’re wearing.