

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
July 26, 2015**

Genesis 37:2-11

Eight Deadly Sins: ENVY

**Hymns: "As the Deer" – 236 –
Distribution hymns: 459, 314 – 260**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Genesis 37:2-11–

² This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your

sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

⁸ His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

It was a story where so much went wrong and so many were truly at fault. It started with the father, whose favoritism could not have been more unabashed as he showed clearly that all were not equal in his eyes. And certainly the fault belonged also to the favored son, who flaunted his envious status as he paraded around in that special coat while laying out details of jealousy-inducing dreams. And of course there was the inevitable jealousy that we saw in the brothers, the envy building in them with each new show of favoritism and each boast of being favored.

And where did all of that favoritism and envy lead? The brothers let their envy lead them to scheme and sell their brother into slavery and lie to their father about what really happened. The favored would learn a lesson in humility as he lived for years as a slave. The favoring father would experience the worst of pains as he presumed to have lost a child.

As we stand at a distance and see envy so destructively ripping this God-fearing family apart, perspective allows us to clearly see a calamity of errors that led to it. How could Jacob be so blatant in his favoritism? How could Joseph be so bold in his boasts? How could the brothers think that their envy-filled actions would make life better? The actions make us shake our heads in wonder and in bewilderment. Of course it played out as it did – just look at how all these people failed to curb the envy that eventually led to such pain.

As we think about that story, perhaps there's one more reason to shake our heads in astonishment. And it happens when we move our eyes away from this story and we look at our own lives. What I mean is this: From a distance, we can look at this story and see the grave mistakes made by Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers. We see the attitudes, we watch the actions, then we cringe at the results; yet then in the midst of our own lives, we often allow these same attitudes and actions to continue on unchecked and unchanged; and we think that

envy won't produce the same kind of ugly results.

So, how important it is for us to find our place in this story. First, so that we find the forgiveness and reconciliation that it took so long for Jacob and his sons to find; and second, so that we might curb our attitudes and actions that lead to this deadly sin of envy.

As you think about this story, perhaps you see yourself as Jacob, and as a parent or grandparent, as an employer or leader, as a teacher or even church leader, you are laying the foundation for envy in the way that you treat others.

Or maybe you take the place of the favored son, Joseph, and as a child, an employee, a student, a church member, you receive special favor, and rather than giving thanks for the blessings, maybe you find subtle and not-so-subtle ways to let those around you know just how good you have it, just how much you are liked, just how much you should be envied.

But mostly, I think that the majority of us can find ourselves most often in this story as those jealous brothers. The reality for these brothers was that they had been given so much; their envy was really so misplaced.

As sons of Jacob, they had a good life. Go back a few chapters in Genesis and you will be reminded of the physical wealth that Jacob had acquired from his uncle Laban, more

than enough to go around for the 12 sons of Jacob.

But more than that, these 11 had the privilege of being sons of the Promise that God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Promise that the Savior of the world would come through their descendants; the Savior that would rescue them from sin, death, and the devil. Because of that promise, these 12 sons would grow into the 12 tribes of Israel; God had plans to bless all of them, both physically and spiritually, beyond their wildest dreams.

Yet, it was envy that filled their hearts. It was envy that caused these 11 to think less of what they had been given and what was promised to them; and more of what was being given in that moment to their brother. Envy blinded their eyes, it corrupted their hearts, it fueled their anger.

Sadly, we don't have to look any further than our own lives to understand just how those brothers could fall into that envious trap. Like those brothers, we have been given so much, every single one of us.

Yet, how often don't we spend our time focused, not on what we have been given, but on what others have. And we could spend all day listing the ways in which we can envy, but more important is to understand where that envy leads us.

The simple truth is that envy in our hearts always produces negative results. Certainly, it can affect our relationships with others. While envy

might not lead you to the hatred and scheming that it led to in the lives of the sons of Jacob, at the very least, jealousy can show its ugly face in bitter comments and petty actions. Envy keeps us from forming relationships or helping

But envy doesn't just affect our interaction with others. Just as it did with Jacob's sons, it affects our relationship with our Father. When jealousy fills our hearts, and our focus turns away from what we have been given, our discontent and ungratefulness to our heavenly Father becomes clear. Envy tells our Provider that what he has given us is not good enough, it tells our God that what he chose for us was not correct.

And inevitably, envy always results in unhappiness and dissatisfaction in our lives as we focus so much on what someone else's life would be like. That constant desire for what others have

So whenever envy threatens our hearts and lives, may we take a few reminders from God's Word.

When envy causes us to think more of ourselves than we ought, when envy tells us that we are deserving of more than what we have been given, turn to God's Word and be reminded of the truth of what we are and what we deserve. While envy tells us that we are deserving of more, the Bible reminds us that we are sinners who deserve nothing good in our lives; the Bible tells us that we should only have pain and punishment filling our

lives. When envy affects our lives, we need God to remind us of what we are.

But we also need God's Word to remind us of what God has made us. As we look at what others have, envy has us think less of what we have been given. But the truth is that as God's children, we have been given everything; the truth is that as children of God, we have nothing to be envious of. By his love, and through the work of Jesus the Son, God has given us forgiveness, he has promised us eternal life, he has made us heirs of heaven. We have been favored by our Father in ways that leave no room for jealousy or envy.

And yet, on this earth, there remains the reality that not all of us are given gifts and blessings to the same degree. And that is where our final reminder comes in. It is a reminder of how God gives to his children. In his wisdom and for the good of his children and the good of his Church, God gives different gifts, God gives different abilities, God gives different blessings. And he gives in those ways with purpose and also with accountability. When God gives more to one of your Christian brothers or sisters, he also will demand more from that person in their use of those gifts. And that means that rather than your envy and jealousy, what that person really needs is your encouragement and support in using those gifts.

It was that thought that Paul had in mind when he wrote **"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."** Notice that as Paul speaks to different gifts, he doesn't say, "If a man has little, let him envy." Instead, Paul encourages us to rejoice in the different gifts that God gives to all of us in his church because he gives in love and he gives with purpose.

It was a family of believers to whom God had given so much, yet envy came and tore Jacob and his sons apart for many years. As we live inside the family of believers to whom God has given so much, may we constantly guard against the envy that so easily comes and so swiftly destroys. Through God's Word, may each of us consider what we are – sinners by nature, God's children by his grace; may we appreciate all that we have as members of the Church; may we rejoice at what God gives for our good. Amen.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. 1984 (Ro 12:6–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.