I’m not an expert on the subject of God. And, I hope I never become an expert on God. To do so, would be presumptuous of me, I mean, “I know no more about God than you do, in spite, of the bible and books I read each week to prepare a sermon.” I read the bible and books written about God to help me understand what other people think about God, but to know God, well, that requires extra humility and insight into things I cannot explain.

Morgan Freeman, the man who traveled around the world from 2016-2019 produced a movie series called “The Story of God.” This is what Freeman says about God,

People spend their lives searching for God, when true

divinity may be in front of us all along. In Hebrew,

Freeman recounted, the word for God is derived from

the verb "to be," making it translate roughly as "I am."

Morgan goes on to say, "God is in all things -- a sunset,

a bloom, a rose.’ The ultimate answer to the question

of God’s existence is, ‘God is.’”

I watched the series, “The Story of God,” a few years ago, and as I thought about our Genesis passage this morning, Morgan Freeman’s words that “God is” impacted how I approached this story of Joseph and the saga behind his family. Questions like, “Why was this story included in the bible?” The entire story of Joseph’s family saga involves chapters 37-50, and I have come to the conclusion it’s an important story if I use length as a measure of importance. Many of my thoughts have been compiled from Abraham Heschel, a Jewish philosopher, who writes nothing specific about Joseph, and Walter Brueggemann, who writes a commentary on the book of Genesis. Somewhere in between these two men I have written a sermon.

First, let me give you a quick snapshot of Joseph’s story. This story begins many years before our Scripture passage in Genesis 45. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was his father’s favorite, and all of his older brothers knew it. Their father had given Joseph a special, richly ornamental coat, what some translations called a coat of many colors. As the story unfolds, Joseph begins to have these wild dreams, and he shares them with his brothers. The dreams seemed to imply that his brothers, and even his parents, would gather around and bow down before him at some time in his life.

Joseph’s brothers become angry and jealous toward him as Joseph prods them with his special favor, so finally they have had enough of him. The brothers initially plan to kill him, but instead, they take his fancy coat, throw him into a pit, and not long after, they sell him into slavery to people on their way to Egypt. They smear some animal blood on his coat, and tell their father, Jacob, that his favorite son has been killed by a wild animal.

Joseph’s adventure story continues in Egypt. He has his ups and downs, but eventually, thanks in part to his ability to interpret dreams, he is given a powerful position in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. A terrible famine came over the entire land in the 10 Century B.C., and Joseph’s brothers make the long trip to Egypt in hopes of getting some food for the family to eat back home in Canaan. When the brothers come before Joseph, he recognizes them, but they do not realize who he is. After some questioning and testing, Joseph finally reveals his identity, and his brothers are stunned at his disclosure, fearing that they will probably now be killed. The world of Joseph’s father and brothers is suddenly shattered … all those dreams that Joseph had had as a child have come true. Joseph is the one who carries power.

Joseph, however, reveals that he only wants to have a relationship with his brothers and father, and tells them to return to get his father. Joseph isn’t interested in displaying his power, except, to help his family out. For Joseph, the family bond is deeper than exercising Egyptian success. Joseph shows the depth of his longing for family relationship when we read, “he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him. There is a back story embedded within this Joseph saga, that creating newness does not come from detachment, but from risky, self-disclosing engagement. There are times when a person must become vulnerable for new life to take place, even when it might not make sense. Joseph becomes vulnerable, offering forgiveness to his brothers, and something new is created, salvation for his family. They are saved from starving.

Joseph was not trapped in bitterness and anger; he would not condemn his brothers for the sins of their past, instead, God’s mercy breaks into his life. In fact, Joseph points out that God has been there all along. “God led us to this place,” Joseph assures them. Even out of the tragedy of this story, mercy and forgiveness somehow emerge to bring forth the ongoing story of God. The story of God presents a different way of being together, of loving each other and offering mercy where harsh judgement is expected.

We read in later chapters in the Old Testament how the Hebrews do not have a stellar history of loving their neighbors, they become just as evil as their neighbors. Under the leadership of Joshua, they kill countless people for the land they want to own, just like the roaming tribes did during 8th Century. This story of Joseph, where mercy and relationship is shown to be the way of the LORD, is somehow forgotten. Yet, are we as Americans any different?

We must look at our own American history. If reading the history of racism is any indication on how America conquered the indigenous people with power and bloodshed, then we have much to answer for ourselves. It is easy to think, “I am not responsible for the past, yet, then how do we explain what is happening to men and women of color in the 21st Century. Men, women, and children who have no food and live in car or on the streets, immigrants who are told to leave our country, and there is not enough housing or education to provide for all families.

We carry this burden of inequality within us, and we say it’s okay. We turn our heads away from this kind of trauma, yet, Jesus says, “A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

What is your story of God? What is my story of God? The story of Joseph’s God is part of a larger story where God will rescue the Hebrews from the hands of the Egyptians. Joseph, as the story shows, must have had to do some deep soul-searching to come to a point where relationship became more important than exercising dominant power over his brothers who tried to kill him.

And, so it is with us. God knows we have areas of our own lives where we have been hurt, or where we have hurt others. There are people we have considered our enemies. There are places in our heart where we want to hold onto anger rather than open up to reconciliation and forgiveness. There may be people we need to make peace with. The God of Joseph, and the God of Jesus remind us love is always possible.

Abraham Heschel tells us, “Responsiveness to God cannot be copied; it must be original with every soul…it is in our inability to grasp God that we come closest to Him.” The Psalmist says, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.” Allow God to change you from the inside out, to surrender to the mystery of God’s spirit, not in resignation, but in love. Amen.