

Year A, Week 36 (August 3, 2008)
Genesis 42-45 Joseph's Family Needs Grain

Hymn suggestions: *Father Abraham* (calmly); or *Shout to the North and the South*

Items Needed:

- Joseph figure
- Block for Joseph to stand on, like a podium to show that he's the boss
- 10 figures for brothers
- 1 figure for Jacob
- LOTS of figures (all the figures) at the end

Directions: set out Jacob with the 11 brothers around him in a circular shape

We've been talking about how God made a promise with his people and He kept those promises through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He told them, "I will be your God, and you will be my people. And you will have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky."

We've been talking about Jacob's son Joseph. Joseph had 11 brothers, but he was his father's favorite. His brothers grew to hate him because they were jealous and because he told them about dreams in which he would become the boss of all of them. One day, they took an opportunity to sell him as a slave to some traders who were on their way to Egypt. Then they tricked their father into believing that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Joseph had good times in Egypt and bad times in Egypt, but the Lord was with him all the time. In our story today, Joseph is in charge of almost everything in Egypt. Mostly, he's in charge of food. There is no food in the whole region, and Egypt is the only place where people can come to get food.

Egypt has food because God helped Joseph, who made a plan to save food. Joseph is the boss of all the food – and nobody was more important than him, except for Pharaoh himself. (*Hold Joseph in your hand, or set him to one side on the block as a platform.*)

Our story today starts not in Egypt, but back in Canaan, where Joseph's father and brothers still live. They have no food. Jacob said to his sons, "I have heard that there's food in Egypt. Go get some for us so we don't starve."

So the 10 oldest brothers headed off, and the youngest brother, Benjamin, stayed with his father Jacob. (*Remove Benjamin and Jacob.*)

They went to Egypt to get food and they came face-to-face with their brother Joseph, who was the boss. (*Place Joseph on block platform in front of all the brothers, in the same place where Jacob used to be.*) They did not recognize their brother because they had sold him to be a slave, not the boss of all of Egypt. But Joseph recognized his brothers.

He pretended not to recognize them, and he gave them a hard time. He asked them a lot of questions and he accused them of coming to Egypt as spies. He even put them in jail for a few days. (*Pick up Simeon or touch him.*) Then he said that Simeon would have to stay in jail while the rest of them went back home and brought their youngest brother, Benjamin, back. (*Set down Benjamin figure with brothers.*) Then when Benjamin did come, Joseph played a trick on him so that it would look like Benjamin was a thief! Joseph truly was the boss, and his brothers were bowing down before him, just as he had dreamed long ago.

The whole time that this was going on, the brothers still did not recognize Joseph. And they felt worried. They thought that their bad treatment was their punishment for the way they had sold Joseph long ago.

The brothers also worried that they would not all be allowed to leave Egypt and go back to their father. When they explained this to Joseph, he could not hide his secret any longer.

He told them, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into slavery. But don't feel bad about it any more, because God sent me here to Egypt so that I could set aside food for you here."

He asked them to go back to their father and to move the whole family to Egypt. This was how God's people – called the nation of Israel – came to live in Egypt. Each of Joseph's brothers had wives and children and servants and animals. (*Add figures one by one to make a big crowd. Set them down in silence while the kids watch. When you're finished, continue with last sentence.*) It was as if their great-grandfather Abraham had as many descendants as there are stars in the sky.

Questions without Response:

- I wonder ... how many years it took before there were descendants as many as the stars in the sky?
- I wonder ... if anyone ever gave up on God's promise?
- I wonder ... how long we could wait for God to keep a promise?
- I wonder ... if we still act like God is our God, and we are his people?