

THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Genesis 37-50

The stranger – our brother?

This is the story of Jacob's sons who made their brother suffer mobbing and violence because they were jealous. The story tells how they were threatened by famine and had to seek help in another country, which had followed a more far-sighted food policy; and how they met a stranger who turned out to be their brother.

The South African artist Azariah Mbatha tells his version of the story in 9 pictures.

Picture 1

Joseph makes his brothers jealous, partly because his father favoured him and gave him a beautiful robe.

Picture 2

Joseph is sold to some passing ishmaelites and his robe is taken from him.

Picture 3

The brothers deceive their parents by showing them Joseph's robe covered with blood. They want it to look as though he was torn apart by wild animals.

Picture 4

Joseph is sold for a second time – to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers in Egypt. Joseph is without his robe – vulnerable, powerless, a stranger in the land.

Picture 5

Potiphar's wife has made a pass at Joseph and been rejected. She gets revenge by accusing Joseph of adultery and uses his robe as evidence for her husband.

Picture 6

Joseph is fetched from the prison and interprets Pharaoh's dreams.

Picture 7

Joseph becomes an important person as Minister of Corn Supplies in Pharaoh's government – once again with a robe. His brothers come from their famine-stricken homeland to get help, but they don't recognise Joseph. They are forced to leave Simeon as a hostage while they go home to fetch the youngest brother Benjamin.

Picture 8

Jacob is unwilling, but is persuaded to send Benjamin to Egypt so they can get food.

Picture 9

Joseph receives his brothers, tells them who he is, is reconciled with them and asks them to bring his elderly father to Egypt too. He gives them land and lets them settle.

Discuss...

- Look at the pictures and read the corresponding chapters together. Choose one picture at a time.

- Use the story as a WINDOW:
What do you see through this window onto the world? What associations do you make with events or people today? Are there people today that behave like the characters in the story?
- Use the story as a MIRROR:
Do you find a reflection of yourself in the story – in Joseph, Rueben, Jacob, Rachel, Benjamin, Simeon, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife...? What does the story say about living conditions and the society that you/we are a part of? What does it tell you about your own willingness to forgive and be reconciled – and to acknowledge "the stranger" as your brother?
- Use the story as a LIGHT:
What does the story communicate about hope for the future? Is there anything that throws light on your life and can help you find the way forward?

"But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.'" (Genesis 50:19-20.)

STORIES FROM NORWAY

MEET A WOMAN FROM SOMALILAND

I WANT TO GO BACK – BUT NOT UNTIL WE HAVE PROPER LAWS

She comes from Somaliland, a country that seceded from Somalia as a result of civil war. The story of her life is about trusting others in the insecurity that all refugees experience. Her account of coming to Norway is not unlike the stories others tell. First to a refugee camp in Ethiopia, where she sold all the jewellery and fabrics she had with her, in order to afford a plane ticket to Yemen. She travelled with her aunt, and in Yemen they were helped by other Somalis to get passports and tickets to Norway. Their helper thought that Norway or Sweden were the best countries to go to, and they chose Norway.

She came here in 1989, and after staying at two asylum reception centres she was granted humanitarian protection after a few months. She has never had problems with the Norwegian immigration authorities. When asked if she has tried to get her family to come here on a tourist visa, the answer is simple: "It's too expensive to come to Norway. No-one in my family can afford it."

In Norway she met a Somali man, and they have two children. She is proud to say that they are doing well at school. As to herself, she complains that she hasn't learnt Norwegian well enough, but her intention is clear enough: "I shall learn to speak perfect Norwegian! How well I do will depend on how keen I am." At the premises of the Christian Intercultural Association (KIA), she can continue to attend a course in Norwegian for as long as she likes. Formerly, her children went to kindergarten here.

She has contact with her neighbours in the block where she lives, and she can tell of an old lady who is pleased with her help in carrying her shopping bags up to the second floor. Her contact with Somalis is mostly at meetings of the organisation Somali Welfare, but also at the mosque on Saturdays. Saturday is the regular mosque day, and the Somalis have their own

mosque. For the time being only one of her children attends the Koran school, becoming familiar with and learning the Koran – in Arabic.

She is very concerned about religion. She is worried about the new school curriculum in Christianity, where the pupils are to learn about all religions, but mostly Christianity, and where provisions for exemption are vague. "Everyone has only one religion", she says. "We cannot have two. It's wrong to think that a religion can become part of you, if you are forced to learn about it."

She wants to go back to Somaliland, to live there. She tells of her aunt who lives alone and is waiting for her niece to decide whether she will go back. She is worried about the way the country is governed, and thinks that Somaliland lacks proper laws and a democratically elected president. When there is more order in the way the country is run, she wants to return. As a qualified teacher she is attractive for many countries, most of all Somaliland.

MEET A MAN FROM NIGERIA, 36 YEARS OLD

After my education in commerce, I worked for some years as a secretary in the government. I started an import firm on the side. After a while, this did so well that I managed to save a good deal of money. The idea of going to Europe and establishing my business there grew stronger. Norway was a random choice, but I knew that I wanted to come to a safe, stable country. The first time I came, was on a tourist visa, but I was not allowed to stay longer. Therefore I applied for asylum. Yes, I invented a story of persecution etc. But to identify myself as an asylum seeker was not easy. At home, asylum seekers have low status. It was an unfamiliar role for me. My application was refused, and I was sent out of the country. But while I lived at the asylum reception centre, I met a Norwegian girl. We got married when I came back to Nigeria, and I was allowed to return to Norway.

Many white people think that it's strange that I, a black man, am married to a white woman. I have first-hand experience of racism. It has been difficult for us to rent a flat. My wife finds it more difficult than I do. The social isolation is hard for me. In Africa we are used to having a lot of people around us and to having big families. I get depressed.

My wife is pregnant. In Norway the child belongs to the mother, in Africa to the father. This makes me feel like a stranger to the child who is to be born. I feel superfluous. I know that the state will intervene and take over my role as breadwinner if I leave. The state has created a space where the woman is independent of the man. Having a child will therefore not help me to feel that I belong in Norway. It seems to me that social bonds such as marriage and friendship are very fragile here. It's too easy to solve problems by getting a divorce.

I would like to live the rest of my life here in Norway. I hope to get my family to agree to combine Nigeria and Norway as our home countries. The culture and ways of life in Norway and Nigeria are so different, and I feel stress when I have to struggle both on the inside and the outside of myself. Western culture disappoints me. It's morally degenerate. Really, I wish I had never set foot on Western soil. The lack of morality makes me depressed.