

Who doesn't love a feast? When I was younger, I loved when we had get togethers with other people, whether it was potluck for my brother's cub scout pack, or leaders meeting at our house. I loved when it was Thanksgiving or Christmas or Easter and there were snacks before the feasts. When I was in college, I began taking over some of the preparation for the feasts. I volunteered to do the grocery shopping and making the plan for Thanksgiving one year. I volunteered to do everything but the turkey because that turkey seemed way beyond my abilities.

I think one of the things that is particularly hard during this "Coronatide" is that we aren't feasting together. We haven't had a potluck since February, even though my reminder goes off every month. There is something about breaking bread together. It's Biblical. Throughout the Gospel stories we see Jesus doing things are food – whether he's feeding the crowds, encouraging us to feed those who are hungry or he's eating with people that the religious authorities said were "unclean." But food doesn't just factor in to our faith in the New Testament. Food is at the heart of today's readings.

Our stories begin because there is no food in Canaan. Jacob sends his sons off to Egypt to buy. The famine in Pharaoh's dream has come to pass. And those in God's chosen family that remained in Canaan did not know to save up grain from the feasts of the previous seven years. When they arrive, Joseph recognizes them but they do not recognize Joseph because they have not seen him about 20 years. He also remembers the dream that angered his brothers and father and now it was coming true. Joseph also learns that he has a younger brother, Benjamin. That's a lot to take in but

Joseph also hears that his brothers think that all of this has happened because of what they did to him 22 years ago.

The brothers travel home with the grain only to find that their money has been returned to them. They panic this could land them in trouble. What's more troubling is that when they run out of grain, the stipulation is that they bring Benjamin with them but Jacob is not having it. Judah finally gets through to his father, promising his own children if anything bad happens. And now all the brothers set off again, they've brought with them the money that was returned, plus money to buy the next shipment along with balm, honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts & almonds. They're ready or so they think.

Joseph has been presented with the gifts, hears that his father is well and as he met his brother Benjamin, he is overcome with emotion. As they sit there together feasting it was a long road to get there. We can look back over the last 22 years of Joseph's life and we know it has not always been filled with the good life. Feasting & famine always seem to go hand in hand.

2019 was a hard year. By the time December came around many people were asking me if I was ready for 2020 to come. The first couple of times I said yes but then I stopped and realized there were good times too. I know that I shared this during Christmas last year when I told the story of a colleague who had the year of the bird – you remember the story of their Christmas tradition where they would always choose a beautiful ornament. But there was a year that was tough – so tough that the after Christmas sales had already begun and they still had not chosen their ornament for the year. When they got to the Target the only ornament left was this ugly,

broken bird. They laughed when they realized that it was the perfect symbol of that tough year. They smile each year that they pull it out thankful that they were not in the year of the bird. And yet 2020 feels as if it could be the ultimate bird year. This year feels like the ultimate year of famine – the year we cannot do all that we long to do.

But famine is not always bad. It was the famine that brought Joseph's family back to him. It was the famine that brought him a brother he never knew he had. It was the famine that allowed his dreams to come true – not in the sense that he was better than his brothers but that he was able to provide a feast for them. Sometimes our feasts are different than we expect. Sometimes we forget just how much work it takes to plan, prepare, cook, serve & clean-up after a feast. But if we're honest with ourselves that doesn't keep us from doing it. The work we do is a part of the feast.

So what does this mean for us? God is at work in our lives, behind the scenes, even when we don't know it. God is with us in times of feast and famine. God is always working for good in the world. God was with Joseph, giving him insight and helping him prepare for the famine that was to come. God was moving in the lives of others that ultimately brought the family together. When will we feast again, we do not know but God will be with us until we do. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.