

Joseph – *Mercy to the Merciless* May 31, 2020

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Genesis 42, 45, 50 (selected verses)

"God was using the brothers' trip to Egypt to bring them face-to-face with their long-concealed sin." Alistair Begg, *The Hand of God*

Joseph, who once had a *robe of many colors*, lost that robe his father made for him when his brothers ripped it off his body and threw him into a dry pit. They would later rip it further and dip it in blood as a "proof of death" to their father, Jacob.

Joseph, a "prince" to his father but a threat to his brothers, lost his freedom when they sold him to the Ishmaelites headed to Egypt who, in turn, sold him to Potiphar, a captain of Pharaoh's guards. A free man-made slave.

Joseph was a good servant – extremely profitable and effective in his stewardship of his master's house. He was also very handsome; and when the boss's wife couldn't seduce him, she falsely accused him of rape, and Joseph was thrown into prison where he languished although loved and favored by God.

Joseph brought up out of the prison and made the "number two man" in all of Egypt was now seated in majesty as the governor of the world's greatest kingdom at that time. He knew God's hand in all that had happened, choosing to name his sons in honor of God's gracious – Manasseh, "God made me forget," and Ephraim, "God made me fruitful." If his story stopped here, it would be a tale of what it means to come down from the mountaintop to the valley and return.

But Joseph's story doesn't stop here.

If you have your Bible with you, please turn to Genesis 42 where we begin reading at verse 6: ***“Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.”*** (Genesis 42:6)

Does this sound vaguely familiar to you? Remember Joseph’s dreams as a youth? He foresaw in his dreams this very moment. God had gifted him with the ability to dream and interpret the dreams of others. His brothers had resented his vision concerning their future – but, here it is, being fulfilled.

Continuing on: ***“Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. ‘Where do you come from!’ he said. They said, ‘From the land of Canaan to buy food.’ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, ‘You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.’ They said to him, ‘No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We are sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.’ He said to them, ‘No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.’ And they said, ‘We, your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.’ But Joseph said to them, ‘It is as I said to you. You are spies. By this you shall be tested; by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out of this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.’ And he put them all together in custody for three days.”*** (Genesis 42:7-17)

Let’s stop there.

Everything that had happened to Joseph had happened because of these ten men. These “brothers” of his were the cause of his trials and tragedies. They were the ones who had set in motion Joseph’s journey from multi-colored robe to misery. God had taken the evil they had inflicted on him and turned things from misery to majesty. Alistair Begg writes in his book, *The Hand of God*, that “*God had been working in Joseph’s heart, fashioning events in such a way that Joseph recognized that all of his days were under the sovereign, providential care of a God who loved him with an everlasting love.*” (p. 160)

While Joseph prospered courtesy of God’s providential care, he needed one more thing to complete his life; he needed to heal his wounds. Joseph needed to heal in the same way that many of us need to heal when hurt by those close to us. Joseph was looking at the ten men – his own brothers – who had caused him great misery. He had a hole in his heart where there should have been warm memories and kindest regards. But Joseph also had a God who works restoration and reconciliation in the lives and souls of man.

Paul speaks of this God who restores and reconciles as he writes to the believers in Corinth a second letter. Put your finger at Genesis, put turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5, picking up at verse 16. The Corinthians had been struggling with the results of deep divisions and squabbling factions. Paul, in two different letters, had been on them about this. He writes, ***“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world***

to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and untrusting to use the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Each of us experiences Joseph’s dilemma . . . this same war inside of us when it comes to forgiveness. We know we should forgive, and we want to honor God, but we also want revenge. We want justice! The thing to remember is that God wants justice, too. The prophet shouts to God’s people: ***“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*** (Micah 6:8) God wants justice more than we do and He will bring it about in His time. Right now, we have a decision to make: **Do we trust God or play God when it comes to justice for sins committed against us?**

Joseph continues playing games with his brothers; testing them, prodding their consciences to the point that they remembered their long-buried wrongs. Picking up at Genesis 42:21, we listen in to their angst-ridden words: ***“Then they said to one another, ‘In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress had come upon us.’ And Reuben answered them, ‘Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.’ They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was no interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept.”*** (Genesis 42:21-24a)

Joseph continues his charade with his brothers, but more toward achieving his aim to reconcile with them than to punish them. He tests them to see if they will do the right thing; and they do. Jump ahead with me to Genesis 45:1 – ***“Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, ‘Make everyone go out from me.’ So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come near to me, please.’ And they came near. And he said, ‘I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be dismayed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for your many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.”*** (Genesis 45:1-8a)

Rather than seek revenge or punish his brothers, Joseph recognized God’s hand in his life and sought reconciliation instead. Why? Alistair Begg surmises that *“Joseph’s profound understanding of providence was the key to his attitude toward his brothers – and, indeed, toward life itself.”* (p. 183) What we see is that Joseph returns his brother’s mean, malevolent, malicious, merciless acts with goodness, kindness, and mercy. Begg concludes that *“In Joseph’s loving response to his brothers, we see a glimpse of God the Father’s expression of love toward us.”* (p. 222)

Turn with me now to Genesis 50, following the death of Jacob. The brothers once again fear that Joseph will take revenge on them. Picking up at verse 19, we read: ***“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”*** (Genesis 50:19-21)

Joseph is a picture of what was to come in Jesus. In Him, we are reunited with our Father; we are saved; we are redeemed; we are restored; we are reconciled. The holes in our hearts are filled-in and healed; the broken are made whole. Jesus does all this, not because of what we have done but because of what He has done on the cross. Max Lucado writes: *“You’ll get through this. Not because you are strong, but because your Brother is. Not because you are good, but because your Brother is. Not because you are big, but because your Brother is the Prince and he has a place prepared for you.”* (*You’ll Get Through This*, p. 128)

During World War II, the city of London was the target of Nazi bombers and rockets. The vast destruction of civilian property and the deaths of thousands of innocent non-combatants was aimed at breaking the morale of the British people with the goal of toppling the government and quashing the resolve of the nation. The British were encouraged to maintain their morale and resolve by posters created and posted throughout the country. Back in 2004, there was a discovery of the posters of last resort. A memo found with them described their posters as being meant for a time when the collapse of the homeland would be considered imminent. They simply read, *“Keep Calm and Carry On.”*

Once again, we acknowledge that Joseph's story puts flesh-and-blood on the words of St. Paul to Christians in Rome: ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”*** (Romans 8:28, 31-32)

So, as we close this chapter of God's Word and the story of Joseph, let's do so, mindful of what we discover about suffering and how we get through with God's help:

“You'll get through this.

It won't be painless.

It won't be quick.

God will use this mess for your good.

Don't be foolish or naïve.

But don't despair either.

With God's help, you'll get through this!”

To God be all the glory – great things He has done – and continues to do in Jesus. Amen!

Sermon Notes: Joseph – *Mercy to the Merciless*

1. God was using the brothers' trip to Egypt to bring them face to face with their long-concealed _____.
2. While Joseph prospered courtesy of God's _____ care, he needed one more thing to complete his life; he needed to _____ his wounds.
3. Each of us experiences Joseph's _____...this same war inside of us when it comes to _____.
4. Do we _____ God or _____ God when it comes to justice for sins committed against us?
5. In Joseph's _____ response to his brothers, we see a glimpse of God the Father's expression of love toward us.
6. You'll get _____ this | It won't be _____ | It won't be _____ | God will use this _____ for your good | Don't be _____ or naïve | But don't _____ either | With God's help, you'll get _____ this!