

February 24, 2019

# ***JOSEPH, JESUS, YOU AND ME***

Genesis 45:1-8a

Dear Friends in Christ,

Twenty-three years ago a pastor sent me a copy of a newspaper article that appeared in the Bloomington, Illinois Pantagraph written by then staff writer, Bill Flick. I've held on to it all these years because it represents the church of this world. Here are some excerpts:

"I served on a church/board once - the term ended only a little more than a year ago although it seemed as if it took the entire 13<sup>th</sup> century - and without making any editorial statements (which, of course, is the gist of the entire article) or offending any church friends, let me just say this: HELP! PLEASE! DON'T EVER MAKE ME DO IT AGAIN, LORD.

"...You join a church to get some peace, tranquility and get away from the daily stresses, and . . ."

Really? Seriously? "You join a church to get some peace, tranquility and get away from the daily stresses..."? How about this? Let's allow the Lord God to confront us with

## JOSEPH, JESUS, YOU AND ME

### I. Joseph.

Backing up to Genesis 37:2 gives us the start: "Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy...". Genesis 37:4 takes us into the depths of human sin: "But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him."

Well, it does have a ring of familiarity. A little jealousy. A little conflict with someone. An unexpected adversarial situation. And boom! Everything flies apart. Been there, done that, right?

And if you work through the Scriptures you quickly see the evil of the brothers: "Then Midianite traders passed by. And they (the brothers) drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt." (Gen. 37:28) Sold their flesh and blood into slavery. And that would be his lot for 13 years, starting at the age of 17. In the course of those 13 years, he was falsely charged with rape by the wife of the captain of the guard whose home Joseph was serving, thrown into prison, and left there to rot, as we say. **And God allowed it!**

The 13 years passed and then came the moment when Joseph was called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. And He did. In response to Pharaoh's dreams, God gave Joseph the wisdom to devise a plan to save Egypt from starvation. We're told:

This proposal pleased pharaoh and all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph...'You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.'" (Gen. 42:37-40)

In an instant, a moment, Joseph is raised from horrid imprisonment to a new life. In this new setting, God would draw Joseph's father, Jacob, Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery, their

families and possessions - would draw them from death by starvation into salvation through this youngest son of Jacob.

Preceding the arrival of his family is the confrontation of Joseph with his brothers. Our text reads:

So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said... "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth... So it was not you who sent me here, but God."

We do want to note that approximately 22 years passed before Joseph would once again embrace his father. That's a long time, isn't it? Especially when you've done nothing wrong. A long time. And all of it - every day - God directed!

## II. Jesus.

Well, you know where this is going. The obvious: The jump from Joseph to Jesus because Joseph, you see, was a picture, a foreshadow of the One Who was loved by His Father, hated by His own, despised and sold for 30 pieces of silver, imprisoned and tormented. But, of course, one additional feature: Crucified! And that for His people. To deliver them from from hell - unending starvation without God's love - to deliver them from hell, the consequence of sin. To deliver and take them into eternal life.

The issue of life is God's willingness to forgive us; to forgive us for a lot of terrible thoughts we repetitively nurture - God's willingness to forgive a lot of nasty and hateful words we justify - God's willingness to forgive a lot of twisted things we do because they momentarily gratify us, but can eternally cheat us and drive us into hell!

The following words of God put everything in order:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (That's a description of us. Not what most want to hear, but the truth, nonetheless.) For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners (that is, off the mark with God, at odds with Him and hateful), Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (Rom 5:6-9)

We don't want those words to quickly pass through our minds: "much more shall we be saved by him (by Jesus) from the wrath of God." Without Christ, that's the only thing we will possess forever and ever: God's wrath! That's something we can truly own forever: God's wrath!! But now it's gone. Eternal starvation and dying are gone. Jesus is the eternal Joseph.

### III. You and Me.

Finally, there's you and me. It's rather simple. God's people have troubles, struggle with life, suffer from disease, accidents and the process of dying. The Holy Spirit had David write, The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit (God allows the broken hearted and crushed moments.) Many are the afflictions of the righteous. (**Many** are the afflictions of God's people!!) But the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Ps. 34:18-19)

You do understand that the deliverance can mean strength to endure the broken heart and crushed spirit, or God takes the problem away, or God delivers the person from this world to eternal life. You do understand that, right? God also had David write, "The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned." (Ps. 34:22)

Peter writes, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking...". (I Peter 4:1a) The suffering and persecution we endure strip away sinful distractions. We grow and mature in our faith - as did Joseph!

Just as in the case of Joseph, God works good out of the bad. That's His promise. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28) Not some or 99%, but "**all** things work together for good." And we should not travel through this world without these words of God through David:

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar... You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me... In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." (Ps. 139:1-1, 5 & 16)

Though these are old and familiar words to most here, they are words that should travel with us through our Joseph moments!

Bill Flick's observation might be typical but it is absurd: "You join a church to get some peace, tranquility and get away from the daily stresses." You join the church to be fed God's love and forgiveness in Christ through Word and Sacrament. Serving the Lord under all circumstances, no matter how difficult or demanding, is a given! Flicks prayer, "HELP! PLEASE! DON'T EVER MAKE ME DO IT AGAIN, LORD." is a prayer no-one should offer to the Lord Who has given us everything in Christ.

I've always enjoyed George MacDonald's observation. I've quoted it before: "How often we look upon God as our last and feeblest resource. We go to Him because we have nowhere else to go. And then we learn that the storms of life have driven us, not upon the rocks, but into the desired haven." The "desired haven" - where God wants us to be. With Him!

There's a lot to learn from Joseph and Jesus - a lot about you and me.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott