

(19 Pent Joseph with images 2016)

19 PENTECOST

SEPTEMBER 21/24/25, 2016

GENESIS 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21; PSALM 32; LUKE 6:32-36

“Faith and Forgiveness”

FIRST, MARSHALL

PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



As you know, Joseph was something of a spoiled brat – but at least he came by it honestly. His father openly called him his favorite child and the boy used his VIP status to lord it over his ten older brothers.

He spied on them, ratted on the offenders when they were lazy, and paraded around them in his coat of many colors like a peacock strutting through a flock of mud hens. Without that fully developed pre-frontal cortex working to keep his mouth shut, Joseph was clueless to the animosity of his siblings. But we, the readers, hear it loud and clear – 3 times in vs. 5-8 we're told that his brothers *hated* him...

In fact, they hate him so much that they plan to kill the boy. Well, Rueben, the oldest, comes to his senses at the last moment and convinces the others to back away from murder. When they throw Joseph in a pit, Rueben plans to return and set the boy free. But before he can act, the other boys decide to kill two birds with one stone, and sell Joseph to some slave traders. Not only do they get rid of the brat – but they also make some money from the sale.

So they take his flashy coat, dip it in some goat's blood, and send it back to their father with this message: *We found this coat – is it Joseph's?*

Isn't that devious...and brilliant? They do not utter an untruth, they speak no falsehood, they tell no lie...they simply let their father conclude that his favorite son had been mauled by a wild animal.

Though they did not kill him, they meant to do evil to the boy.

And so begins Joseph's journey into adulthood – which means he had to grow up hard and fast: first as a **slave** and then as a **prisoner**. Think about what happened to this kid...

After his brothers betray him, he's sold to a man named Potiphar – a captain of Pharaoh's guard. And we're told two things that immediately put us at ease. Says chapter 39, v. 2: *The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man.* Happy days are here again, right? No worries...

Joseph quickly rises in Potiphar's esteem – he's honest, he's a hard worker, he's good at leading people – so good, in fact, that the captain of the guard soon puts him in charge of his entire estate. Well, the young man is about to learn that having the LORD with him does not mean that troubles won't follow.

Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him. When he refuses, she lies, says that **he** tried to attack *her* and...he gets thrown in the clink. From the water pit that his hateful brothers threw him into, to the pit of prison into which his master's wife gets him banished, you'd think that Joseph would be down in the dumps.

But once again we're told that *the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.* So much favor, in fact, that in no time at all, Joe is running the prison!!!

And shortly after that, he's called on to exercise another skill set. Two of Pharaoh's assistants have been thrown in jail. Both have perplexing dreams and can't figure them out. Joseph says to the men, *Don't interpretations belong to God? Let me hear 'em.*

They speak. Joseph listens. He has good news for one, bad news for the other, and both come true as he predicted. When the cup bearer is released from prison, Joseph begs him, *Please...make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this place.*

The man agrees...but the minute he walks away from jail, he forgets all about that Israelite dreamer – for two whole years!!

That's quite a list of people who have abused, betrayed, lied about or forgotten Joseph. *What kind of person would you be if you had to switch places with him?*

I'm thinking it would've been **VERY** hard for **ME** to remain so **positive**, to embrace every change and take it on as a challenge, especially when lied about or betrayed.



Have you ever been hurt by someone...deep down where it *burns*?

- betrayed by a loved one?
- cheated by a business partner?
- lied about by a relative?
- falsely accused by a neighbor or friend?

How does that make you feel?

-hurt, angry, frustrated...

And what does that make you want to do?

-hurt back, get revenge...

What happens to people who cannot forgive, who have to get even with those who've caused them pain?

The 1993 movie, TOMBSTONE, is about the infamous gunfight at the OK Corral. One day Wyatt Earp (Kurt Russell) and Doc Holliday (Val Kilmer) talk about a cold-blooded killer named Ringo. Earp says, *What makes a man like Ringo, Doc? What makes him do the things he does?*

Doc Holliday answers, *A man like Ringo has got a great big hole, right in the middle of him. He can never kill enough, or steal enough, or inflict enough pain to ever fill it.*

- <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108358/quotes>

For some reason, after every disappointment, every set-back, every betrayal, Joseph refuses to seek revenge on those who've hurt him. To do so, is to open that black hole inside us – a hole that's always empty and can never be filled. Thanks be to God that Joseph clings to the promise that God is with him – no matter what happens.

Now, a popular question to ask here is: *Why didn't God just cut to the chase, send Joseph directly to Pharaoh and bypass all that persecution and pain???*

I don't know the answer to that - except to say *that's not God's style*. For some reason, God seems absolutely committed to 1) working through people who appear to be the last, the lost, the least and the lowly. And 2) God seems less inclined to prevent bad things from happening, even as he demonstrates an immense pleasure in making good come out of those painful moments. So it is with Joseph...who simply keeps working hard, being honorable, and taking care of the people around him...



Finally the day comes when *Pharaoh himself* is plagued by bad dreams, nightmares that can't be interpreted by anyone in the country. Suddenly, his assistant smacks himself on the head and tells the story of his dream in prison and of the man who interpreted it correctly.

So Joseph is sent for, cleaned up and introduced to Pharaoh who talks about his disturbing dreams. *Does anyone remember what they were?*
-7 fat cows are devoured by 7 skinny cows crawling out of the river
-7 fat stalks of grain devoured by 7 skinny stalks coming from the river

Joseph tells the king that 7 good years of harvest will be followed by 7 years of drought, and if not managed well, the drought will destroy the nation. Pharaoh is so impressed that he elevates Joseph to the 2nd most powerful position in the country. And as the young man was able to run Potiphar's house, and manage the prison, so he's able manage this crisis and save enough food not only for the Egyptian people, but for all the people in that part of the world...

...which brings our story full circle – because Joseph's brothers are eventually sent by their dad to buy grain from the Egyptians.



Long story short, Joseph sees them when they arrive and leads them on a journey of self-discovery. He introduces a few mini-crises in the lives of his brothers, who immediately assume that God is finally punishing them for their treatment of Joseph so many years before.

Finally, though, he:

- reveals himself to his brothers,
- forgives them for their evil intentions, and
- is able to bring his entire family to Egypt where they thrive in one of the most desirable part of the nation. After many years of happy living, their father finally dies of old age.

Here's how the story ends: many years have passed since Joseph first forgave his brothers, saved their lives, and gave them the opportunity to thrive in a foreign land. Yet all those years later, when their father dies, the brothers worry that maybe Joseph has been **faking** his forgiveness just for the sake of their father.

**Though you intended to
do harm to me,
God intended it for good**



So they come to their powerful brother with a story. They tell him: *'We are here as your slaves.'* ¹⁹*But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?' ²⁰Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it for good...God intended it for good!*

Somehow, Joseph was able to let go of his anger, his pain, his thirst for revenge, and trust that God would take care of all that. And as every one of us knows, that's not an easy thing to do.

We learn a couple of good things from the story of Joseph.

First of all, we're reminded that revenge is always a downward spiral – nothing good can come from it, but lots of bad things will...including, especially, one's peace of mind, sense of contentment in life, and the ability to find joy. Joseph had the promise of God's loving presence with him – and the good sense to not let his heart be consumed with thoughts of revenge.

A Cherokee Indian elder was teaching his grandson about life.

*A fight is going on inside me, he said to the boy. It's a terrible fight...between two **wolves**. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.*

He continued, The other wolf is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."

The boy thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, *Which wolf will win?* The old man simply replied, *The **one** you **feed**.* (<http://www.virtuesforlife.com/two-wolves/>)

Joseph chose to feed the good wolf – he refused to seek revenge on those who had hurt him, and trusted in God to make everything right. By doing so, he not only blessed himself, but was also able to bless countless others by using the gifts God had given him for good.



The other thing we learn is that we're never fully aware of the impact of our actions. By trusting that God was with him, by refusing to give in to that urge to seek revenge, Joseph saved the lives of the Egyptians, countless strangers and his family. Not a bad life-time's work.

However, one of his older brothers, named Judah, we find actually mentioned in the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel – when the author details the lineage of Jesus. There is Judah's name – ancestor of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the entire world.

Thanks be to God for Joseph – and may we live to serve in the same trusting way – filled with faith and forgiveness. Amen.