

WHAT GOOD CAN COME OF THIS?

8/16/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Proper 15 (A): Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; ~~Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32~~; Matthew 15: ~~(10-20)~~, 21-28

Have you ever had something happen in your life—some sort of awful upset or catastrophe that made no sense (where you're asking yourself, "what good could possibly come of this!?")—and then later, after you're well on the other side of it, you look back and think, "Oh. Now it makes sense. That's why I had to go through this."

The protagonist in a novel I read recently, explained it this way:

...our lives are steered by uncertainties, many of which are disruptive or even daunting; but ~~that~~ if we persevere and remain generous of heart, we may be granted a moment of supreme lucidity—a moment in which all that has happened to us suddenly comes into focus as a necessary course of events...¹

Which is what's going on in our reading from Genesis. Joseph is claiming all that has transpired has happened for a reason.

Some of you probably recall the story of Joseph and his family, but let's review it. Joseph was the son of Jacob, a man who had been through plenty of his own missteps and reconciliations over his lifetime. Altogether, Jacob had 12 sons, but Joseph was the youngest and Jacob's favorite. Another memorable thing about Joseph is that he had what's called "a coat of many colors".

The problem with Joseph being his father's favorite is he didn't realize how irritating he had become to his brothers. To make it worse, as a teenager, Joseph told them about the dreams he'd been having that he was a Lord and they were bowing down to him.

So, one day when the brothers were miles from home, they decided to get rid of Joseph. As they contemplated options from killing him to leaving him in a deep pit, a group of slave-traders came along, and Joseph was sold into slavery. The brothers smeared animal blood on his coat and took it home to their father as evidence that Joseph had been attacked and killed by a predator.

Over the years, Joseph consistently listened for God's voice and faithfully acted upon God's guidance. In the process, he was eventually released from enslavement, and at some point, he interpreted a couple of very important dreams for men who worked for Pharaoh. So, when Pharaoh was in need of dream interpretation, his men recommended Joseph.

Joseph told him the dream indicated that there would be several years of abundant harvest in the kingdom, followed by seven years of famine, and that they should store up the abundance, so that the country wouldn't be affected by the famine.

As you might remember, all of this unfolds just as Joseph predicted. One day his family sent a few of his brothers to, essentially, beg for food, having heard the neighboring kingdom had grain to spare. They had no idea, of course, that they were about to re-

¹ *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles

connect with their baby brother, who had become quite successful, well-respected, and was now, in fact, considered a Lord.

Because they didn't recognize him, Joseph plays with them a bit before revealing who he is. Which brings us to today's passage where Joseph reveals that, in fact, he is the brother they sold into slavery. But rather than trying to seek revenge or demand what some might consider his right to justice, Joseph says, "Don't be distressed! This all happened so that I could save my country, and my family from famine."

At Coffee Hour the past few weeks we've been using the Way of Love curriculum, and we recently answered the question: "How does hearing the stories of God working in Scripture help you spot God working in the world today?" My answer pointed to this story of Joseph, because it's messy and complicated—and full of the kind of family dysfunction most of us have experienced. But no matter the twist or turn in Joseph's journey—and there were many more than I just mentioned—he doesn't give up. He simply keeps putting one faithful foot in front of the other.

So, here's what I hope you take away from this. I don't think God wills awful things to happen, but even in the midst of the most horrible circumstances, God uses us to create something new, to reconcile us and others back to God.

When you ask in the coming weeks, "What good could possibly come of this!?" be patient, be aware, and be willing to be changed, for Jesus says: "My beloved, great is your faith!".

-AMEN

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, 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 five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but

God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Psalm 133

- 1 Oh, how good and pleasant it is, * when brethren live together in unity!
- 2 It is like fine oil upon the head * that runs down upon the beard,
- 3 Upon the beard of Aaron, * and runs down upon the collar of his robe.
- 4 It is like the dew of Hermon * that falls upon the hills of Zion.
- 5 For there the LORD has ordained the blessing: * life for evermore.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

