

*The long and winding road.* The final sermon in a series based on the life of Joseph preached on August 13, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons; GENESIS 50:14-22

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14

**I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.**

That is where we left the story last week.

I think dismayed is an understatement

Heart palpitation, anxiety attack, valium worthy, stomach churning, mixed with shock would be more accurate.

I wonder what was going through each brother's head as Joseph does "the reveal".

I wonder what is going through Judah's mind, even though on his brothers' behalf he as 'fessed up to the wicked actions committed by all of them upon Joseph 20 years before

One thing to be all emotional and weepy.

Quite another to say to the brothers" I forgive you"

What follows in the story is Joseph beginning to come to terms with the question of reconciliation with his family; AND

His brothers dealing with the enormity of the consequences – Joseph is not only alive,

But alive as the viceroy of Egypt.

Egypt has storehouses of much need grain – for the whole area is in the midst of a great famine.

So I believe these last 5 chapters of Genesis and this extended ending of the Joseph story – are the story teller’s attempt to tie up as many loose ends as he can.

I wonder though has Joseph’s lengthy manipulation of his brothers scarred them so deeply that they (the brothers) wonder whether Joseph’s words will truly match his actions.

I wonder whether they will for the rest of their earthly lives feel like they are waiting for the other shoe to drop

The tension in the family remains – as evidenced by Joseph’s continuing assurances that there is no need to be tense or anxious – no need at all!

But for those who are masters at seizing defeat out of victory,

And I cannot help but believe that one or more of the brothers has this mindset – the what might be, What could happen mindset – where no matter how good the present times and the future looks good – they are always in a “well you never know – let’s not be too confident or self assured”

Life for such people is so narrow – for they concentrate almost exclusively on the what could be,

Might be and can never fully enter into life in the here and now.

Maybe Joseph cannot be completely trusted – BUT right now he has told us, Wept while he has told us, Confessed before us his unforgiving spirit toward the brothers.

And summarized his nasty life experiences in the light of his acknowledgement of God's active involvement in his life

Maybe it is time we give him the benefit of the doubt!!

Yes, Father Jacob has died  
Yes, Joseph has the power to kill us all – to balance the accounts as it were.

Perhaps, Dad's death may make Joseph feel very different toward us

Perhaps!

What the story teller gives us in the reading Kate did this morning is one of the best examples in all of scripture

*That our intentions,*

*Our lives are part and parcel of God's unyielding intent,*

*Lavish generosity,*

*Great mercy*

*Forgiveness, grace and love for each and every one of us*

**For though you intended to do harm for me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.**

What a marvellous and freeing way to live!!  
To acknowledge all the pain, upset,  
disappointments, disorienting experiences, regrets,  
failed opportunities and see those things through  
the filter and mindset that God is good – all the  
time, all the time!!

Joseph's trust in the sovereign goodness of  
God carried him through a long and winding road  
of terrible trials.

And not just carried him with a sort of grim  
determination, but with what is clearly a joyful  
spirit.

Joyful here not meaning smiling continually,  
Happy clappy sort of joy  
Joyful in the sense of the assurance and peace of  
mind that no matter what happens,  
*God is still very much in control.*

I have long been struck by these verses at the  
end of the Joseph story.

For they point to perspective on life that does not  
disallow bad things to happen to good people,  
But they ask us to put the bad stuff in the context of  
God's plans and purposes – here and now and  
eternity.

They remind me that the here and now is not all  
there is.

It is not the end.

It is not the final word.

But if you live a life dominated by the tyranny of the immediate, the here and now becomes everything!!

Nothing that happens is able to be set in a broader context.

The story teller does not let us know how Joseph cultivated this long view perspective on life – *you intended it for evil, but God intended it for good.*

But Joseph has it and it is a significant aspect of how he views his life – past, present and future. I wonder if he came to it and cultivated this mindset in prison.

Often alone with our thoughts we become reflective – not in a navel gazing way and rehashing old hurts and regrets

Reflective in a way that we try to see a wider meaning to what has happened and is happening in our lives.

Is God trying to tell us something by this or that experience?

Compassion, grace, understanding, thankfulness, kindness, empathy?

There is a mistaken idea; still widely promoted in some Christian circles that when we are hit by a trial – whether it is sickness or a difficult person,

Or a financial setback – we are just supposed to claim our victory over it by our faith.

If we do not experience fairly rapid deliverance from this trial, then the argument goes that there must be something lacking or defective with our faith!

Talk about being kicked in the head when you are already down for the count!!

What if

*Instead of practicing* this very spiritually unsatisfactory and weak understanding of the goodness of God,

We were able to say,

Yes, I am in pain.

Yes, I hurt.

Yes, I am angry, disappointed, anxious, and fearful and feeling more than a little disoriented,

I still believe – even in tears – God is sovereign over all,

*Even the evil things people do*

*And the garbage and the nasty things, the disappointments and the unfulfilled dreams and hopes of my life,*

To say and to cultivate such an attitude does not mean passively enduring a nasty situation.

For example,

If you are or you know of a situation of child abuse or domestic violence,

This must be reported to the proper authorities

If you are being bullied – physically or on social media – again report this to the proper authorities.

There is no excuse for bullying today – never was actually – but when I was a kid, it seemed to be just part of going to school – some kids were bullied – sometimes mercilessly.

As we grow up, that sense of terror about certain people often continues.

What though would happen if we were able to acknowledge the times in our lives we were bullied and then ask – what did I learn from this time?  
Was it in any way “redeeming” now as I look back?  
 Knowing that the sovereign God was there – is here and will be here until time ends  
 And the first and last word is God and God is in control.

Evil people and bullies are not in control.  
 Worldly power is not the last word.

Come back to Joseph for a moment – Joseph came to see that it was not luck or chance that he ended up in Egypt.  
 He believed in a sovereign God who sent him down to Egypt to accomplish that which Joseph accomplished.

Take note – *God's sovereignty is not only over the major things that happen in our lives,*  
*But also over the little mundane details for life*  
 Car problems, traffic jams, interruptions with sick kids, plugged toilets – the messes of this world  
 The little frustrations of this life  
 Whatever happens to you, everything is under God's sovereignty

God's purposes may be delayed for a time or a season – but not indefinitely.

To cultivate the mindset Joseph verbally affirms here before his brothers in chapter 50, we need to *hang on, even in tears and with cries of lament to the truth God intended it for good (50:20)*

The Goodness of God – affirmed many times in the Psalms –

Psalm 27:13-14.

**I am still confident of this:**

**I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of  
the living**

**Wait for the Lord;**

**Be strong and take heart**

**And wait for the Lord.**

It is a mindset affirmed over and over again by St. Paul – Kate read that well known section from Paul's Philippian letter

Let me give to you another – that introductory sentence to the well known, “**nothing shall ever separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus**” piece found in Romans 8

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. WOW! I**

**MEAN WOW!!!**



Most of us are quick to see God's goodness in the blessings of life,

But not so quick to discern His goodness in the trials. TRUE?

To say God is good in everything he does, rings hollow at times and seasons in our lives.

At times, when the goodness of God is affirmed it may make us come across as insensitive, even cruel.

There are those Christians – waterboys in the game of life

What do they REALLY know?

How dare they tell me God is good in the mist of this particular trial or my particular upset or crisis!!!

There is nothing simplistic or insensitive about Joseph, or the Psalmist's or St, Paul's affirmations about the goodness of God

These people in Bible times,

We today and those who have preceded us in the Christian faith are able to affirm the goodness of God, because through personal struggles and experiences of trials,

We have sought God and found him to be more than able to deal with the crisis, trial, upset in which we find ourselves.

That is,

the scripture writers were able to specific times and places where in spite of all – the goodness of God continued to shine – and not just in a break through

the clouds or the fog way – but shine with a  
 brightness and intensity they cannot help but point  
 out, show and live daily in the light  
 GOD IS GOOD! BELIEVE THAT!

To cultivate the sort of mindset Joseph  
 came to practice as evident in the words of promise  
 and reassurance to his brothers also means that *we*  
*trust God over the long haul.*

It may be years or perhaps only in eternity before  
 we figure out specifically how God is using our  
 trials for good.

Take Joseph – he had to keep trusting in God  
 for years as he sat in that Egyptian dungeon.

I wonder how many times he said, “Lord, I  
 trust that You have some good and loving purpose  
 in this situation.

I wonder if he ever cried out or how many times he  
 cried out “**How long, O Lord**”.

Long haul perseverance,  
 Long term trust in the living Lord is never  
 automatic.

It is not part of our hard wiring as human beings.  
 It is a skill, a discipline that needs to be learned and  
 practiced.

I remember way back in seminary in a  
 preaching class, a classmate said in a practice  
 sermon,  
 It takes 60 days to grow a squash.

It takes a 100 years go grow a small oak tree –  
 which sort of Christian do you want to be – squash  
 or oak tree

**For though you intended to do harm for me, God  
 intended it for good, in order to preserve a  
 numerous people, as he is doing today.**

What a hopeful way to bring to a close a great story  
 in scripture.

As we have seen though, this is not just a story  
 locked into Biblical times.

This is a living story – it is in so many ways **OUR  
 STORY.**

Joseph had to deal with trials and  
 disappointments – so do we.

Joseph had to learn how to wait – so will we  
 and to wait with purpose and intentionality

Joseph chose to keep God at the centre of his  
 life – where God rightfully should be in ours. He  
 therefore chose wisely.

How will we respond to the God who has  
 already chosen us in Jesus Christ?

Joseph was able to see that the evil and the  
 nastiness that happened to him was not the end  
 word – but rather something through which God  
 could and does work for his benefit and the benefit  
 of many.

May the same be said for each of us

And as the late American broadcaster would say,  
*“...and now you know the rest of the story.” AMEN*