

The Dreamcoat

We've read a lot of scripture this morning and I hope you will go home and fill in the gaps. Basically we have read excerpts of the story of Joseph so you can get a sense of the flow and magnitude of this event in the book of Genesis.

And most of you know that the story of Joseph went from the Bible to Broadway in the Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. But there is a lot in the Biblical story that is very different from the musical, even though I love the musical and I think we want to do some of the songs from it at some point in the spring.

So I want to encourage you to go home and read the story of Joseph in Genesis (chapters) It's a very moving story...I can't read that without getting deeply moved....And for a few minutes I am going to summarize this story for you so that you understand it...

Why are we doing the story of Joseph this morning to end our forgiveness series? Because it is a powerful story of forgiveness in families and **it is also the place where the word forgiveness first appears in the Bible...forgiveness is at the core of this whole account – that is a sprawling convoluted account that actually stems back to generations before...**

Where **all kinds of dysfunction was going on in the families of Joseph's lineage.**

Abraham and Sarah set the unpleasantness in motion by sending Sarah's stepson Ishmael away so that their son Isaac could be the favored child.

This conflict is still seen in the relationship between the spiritual descendants of Ishmael and Isaac, the Muslims and the Jews.

Isaac married Rebecca, who gave birth to twins name Esau and Jacob.

And Isaac loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob and this led to a great deal of manipulation as Rebecca and her favored son deceived Isaac and cheated Esau out of his birthright.

So its no wonder that Jacob, Joseph's Dad chooses a favorite child too. That child was Joseph.

Josephs story makes it easier to accept that none of us had the perfect parents There are no perfect parents, just as there are no perfect children or siblings. You didn't have them. Neither did I.

So Joseph got special treatment and at one point he receives from his father an extraordinarily beautiful and expensive multicolored coat.

His father told his brothers and sister what a special child Joseph was, which of course was just the thing Joseph's siblings wanted to hear...right? Siblings always appreciate it when one of them is more valued than another...don't they?

Then Joseph has dreams where he sees his brothers bowing down before him. And he doesn't keep this to himself. He tells them. Can you imagine at breakfast...in his multicolored expensive coat...him going to his brothers and saying Hey guys...I just this dream! I was standing there and you all came and bowed down in front of me.

And you can imagine his brothers were just thrilled with that. They probably choked on their cereal and clenched their fists. The funny thing is, Joseph is tone deaf to his brothers resentment of him. He shares these things with them naively and stupidly...and meanwhile his brothers are seething.

The brothers anger builds up until one day, filled with rage at this obnoxious child who obviously is so absorbed in how wonderful he is, and watching their father Jacob continue to lavish favors upon Joseph, while they – the 11 brothers - are ignored by comparison...the brothers decide to kill him.

Joseph goes out to the field where they are watching their flocks to check on them, and he is alone...and they think...Oh...here is the opportunity we have been waiting for...

But one of them, says "Wait a minute. Let's not kill him. There's a Midianite slave-trading caravan right over there. Maybe they'd buy him from us. We'll make some money, he'll wind up a slave, and we can tell Dad he was eaten by a wild animal. He'll be out of our hair for good!

So that's what they did. Joseph was betrayed by his family. He was just a kid at the time – maybe ten or eleven years old.

He's ten/11 years old, and his brothers sell him into slavery. They ripped his coat and dipped it in goats blood and told their father that Joseph have been mauled and eaten by wild beasts.

Their father's heart was broken and Joseph wound up in Egypt. Joseph had to endure years of slavery in Egypt and then a false accusation that sent him to prison.

So lets a pause a minute here and just make this practical...Can you think in your own life of your family, and maybe how perhaps your parents or siblings or other close family disappointed you or hurt you? Some of you may struggle to think of anything...others of you are immediately seized with painful memories.

Most of us probably can remember some disappointments and pain in our family, but also we have an appreciation for blessings received as well. Some things that happen in families are small annoyances and hurts.

Like the son who came to his Mom after his sister had a sleepover where a friend spent the night. And he came to his Mom and said "You have no idea what my sister and her friend did while I was sleeping! They shaved my armpits!" So the Mom went to talk with the sister and said "What on earth possessed you to do that?" and no matter what the sister said in protest, she was grounded.

Well, ten years later the son came to his Mom and said, "Mom I've got something to confess. That night, I shaved my own armpits to get my sister in trouble."

OK. This kind of stuff happens in families.

Families have plenty of hurts and problems amongst each other – some big some small – and these things have to continually be worked through. We can hold onto these resentments, or we can decide to forgive. If we don't let go of resentments its going to be tough to maintain any relationship in our families whatsoever.

There's an acronym called R-A-P which I think is a good acronym especially for forgiving our families.

R- Remember your own shortcomings

A – Assume the best about your family members

P – Pray for God's blessings for the other one...

This usually works – especially for the smaller infractions. And if you are an adult and your kids have hurt you or your parents are still doing things that are hard to take....you might try praying like this:

God please bless my (family member). I'm assuming she/he doesn't really mean what she said, and that she doesn't know that it hurts. I pray that you would bless her and help her to become the woman you desire. Make me a blessing to her. Help me to let go of my frustration/anger/disappointment or hurt in Jesus' who forgave me all of my shortcomings....

That's a prayer for family that you can use, that follows that RAP acronym. If you are using R-A-P and it still doesn't seem to work...try adding an S.

The **S** stands for "**Seek to understand**"

You do your best to try to comprehend what made the other person into what they are today. Try to understand what has shaped them in their past, and recognize that "**hurt people, hurt**". Right?

Let's get back to Joseph. It is quite likely that Joseph held on to the pain of what his brothers had done to him for quite a while.

This was no small infraction.

They had come close to taking his life. This was a monumental betrayal. The great thing about Joseph was that even though he endured terrible circumstances in slavery and in prison he refused to turn his back on God.

We said last time that only God can give us the power to forgive, when we can't do it on our own.

We said last time that asking God's help to forgive the deep wounds of our past, when the violation or infraction is large, is the only way to begin to live freely again

Joseph could have turned his back on God while he was in prison and he could have chosen to seeth in resentment and bitterness. Instead, I can imagine Joseph praying something like ***"God please do something with these terrible circumstances. I can't change what's happened in the past, but I pray that you might reshape the future."***

Now we don't know how long Joseph was in prison or in slavery. But somehow during those long years something happened to him. The bad things that had occurred began to shape his character in a positive way. He seemed to be able to give his pain over to God.

His soul deepened, and his dependence on God was strengthened. His suffering changed him from a narcissistic little boy, into a man. A man of compassion, strength and integrity.

Its funny how suffering does that to you, when you bless it and you hand it over to God. (quote?)

Finally Josephs amazing ability to interpret dreams is discovered, and he is eventually called out of the dungeon to interpret one of Pharoah's dreams that none of the wise men attending Pharoah can do.

And because of this amazing gift, Joseph becomes Pharoah's trusted advisor, and eventually the chief governor of Egypt. And he was charged with leading Egypt's efforts in food distribution.

Well a famine comes, strikes the land, and also strikes the land of Canaan where Joseph's brothers lived and where Jacob, Joseph's Dad, still grieved his loss....so much so that when the brothers are forced to go to Egypt to buy grain...he will not let his youngest son Benjamin go with them.

Benjamin had the same mother Joseph had, and Jacob cannot bear the thought of the possibility of losing Benjamin as well as Joseph. That's how we can tell from Scripture that so many years later Jacob is still in the pit of grief over the loss of Joseph, whom he presumes is dead.

And now you have the scene, that Joseph saw earlier in his dreams. His brothers come to Joseph...and bow before him asking for food. They have no idea who Joseph is. Not a clue. And a long story evolves that is really worth reading about how Joseph does not let them know who he is the first time, and sets it up so that the next time they come back, they do indeed bring Benjamin.

Its as if Joseph wants them to undo his betrayal by caring for Benjamin and caring for their father Jacob – not betraying them this time.

In the end when they do bring Benjamin, Joseph reveals to them who he is. None of this is easy for Joseph. Its not like he easily deals with this situation... Rather...

It says that Joseph cried so loud that everyone in Pharoahs household heard it. Pharoahs house is pretty big. Huge in fact...and ...all the pain and the hurt and the longing for home had been within him since he was a child sold into slavery...and he lets that go...

He was wailing, and crying out ... that pain was so deep...he'd been terribly wounded and he was letting it go...

Now of course the brothers are petrified. Here is Joseph, their little brother, second now only to Pharoah, the one they sold into slavery, and almost killed. Their lives are on the line..at a word Joseph could have them put to death, or make them slaves.

That would be justice wouldn't it? An eye for an eye. Isn't that old testament language for justice? Lex talionis? You hurt me, I hurt you back.

But Joseph has another way of looking at this, because through all of his pain he never let go of God. As I said, the suffering he has been through has made him wise, and taught him as the Apostle Paul wrote centuries later **“In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

And that's not a trite statement, to put on a plaque and hang on your wall and understand in a superficial way. Cause you can't understand that scripture in a superficial way...

That's a statement that you only understand when you have emerged out of the other side of suffering and recognize that in the deepest darkest places God has turned what was evil in your life into something that brings glory to him.

Joseph didn't know that verse. It hadn't been written yet. But he still summed up that same meaning when he looked at his brothers and said, **“You meant it for evil. God meant it for good.”**

Lets say that together: ()

This principle pulsates like a refrain through all of scripture. You cannot read scripture without seeing this truth happen again and again through out history...for those who have the courage to forgive.

If you don't know this truth, its much harder to forgive, and almost impossible to believe in God in such an evil world.

But you find out when you hold onto God through it all...that the truth is that no matter what happens to you in your life, no matter how devastating or dark....when you relinquish it to God and forgive (and that's a process that sometimes takes a long time)...the Holy Spirit gets us to a place where we can indeed say God "They meant that for evil...you meant it for good" And when you can say that...really mean it...it releases the power of the Holy Spirit into your life and into the lives of your offenders in a way that will not let evil triumph.

Forgiveness neutralized the negative charge of evil, and allows God to bring a blessing out of a curse.

Does that make sense? That's why Jesus says these phenomenal things about "Bless those who curse you." OR "Pray for those who use you." OR "If your enemy asks for a drink give it to him." "If someone forces you to go a mile...go with them two miles."

This isn't a milk sippy way to live. A passive, wimpy, weak expression of our faith. Rather, its a tremendously courageous expression. Because you are putting more faith in God's ability to redeem the situation, than you are in the evil that you experienced.

You are saying with Joseph in all confidence and faith that God has the ability to redeem any situation - no matter how devastating - for his glory and honor and praise!

Wow! That's an amazing truth. Some have defined forgiveness as "**giving up the hope of a different past, and instead, taking on the hope of a joyful future.**"

And if you can tuck that under your belt, put it as a reminder blip on your cell phone, make it a way to live day by day by day....resentment will begin to melt, God's presence will become more real to you, and you will begin to see the very truth of those words come alive for you in your experience.

Where in your life do you need to say with Joseph..."**You meant it for evil, but God meant it ...or means it...for good**"

Where do you need to let go of **resentment** which means at its root(resentir) "**feeling the same thing over and over again**" and trust in God's grace and his

powerful ability to turn evil on its head and create something good out of something bad?

I've told you before that nothing is ever wasted in God's economy. **When you hand something over to the Lord with the desire to forgive**, when you are truly able to give it to him, **mountains are moved; resentment melts; compassion explodes; lives are changed and the Holy Spirit is free to move.**

I've also told you before that I can't preach something to you without living it out myself. Its part of the liability of being in this profession – I've got to tell you. Anyone here...if you are going into the ministry...just know that.

If I am going to preach it, I've got to walk the walk, and I constantly am aware of God putting situations right in front of me that demand that I do what I am talking to you about on any given Sunday.

Some of you know our family quite well. And some of you have said to me, "Oh...you have such a wonderful family." I love our family, but I don't want anyone to think that outside of God's grace and forgiveness we would even be a family today.

It has been a journey that I wouldn't trade for the world, but it has been a journey that has demanded forgiveness again and again and again.

Tim and I have shared with you our story, and how outside of us forgiving each other, we would have lost our marriage long ago. We were on the brink folks, and God brought us back together.

In addition, those of you who have read my book Running in Circles know that I was raised by a mother who had a mental illness. Much like Joseph, there were centuries of severe dysfunction in our family down through the generation resulting in my experience growing.

When I went to therapy to work all this out, I was told by an expert in the field that my childhood was one of the worst cases of emotional abuse they had ever heard of.

I don't talk about this too much because I don't want to use this platform to tell you about me. I want this to be a place where you can hear about how wonderful Jesus is. That's always been my focus and always been my goal.

So that's the goal of sharing this with you too. Not the pain...but what God did with that pain. And I believe that I forgave my mother long ago, and I put that into Gods hands. I could see how even what had happened to me as a child has made me stronger, given me a greater understanding of people, of mental illness and of Gods faithfulness in the darkest places...

I know that when someone comes to me who is suffering I can, not because I learned in seminary as an abstract principle, but because I have walked through the valley and know this in the core of my being....I can..I am able to say with utter and complete conviction..."God will turn this for good if you can give it to him and trust him with it." ...

But just a couple weeks ago...and of course its right in the middle of this series on forgiveness...God will not give me a break...I get an email from my mother. She wants us to come and visit her. She wants to see me!

Now you have to know that at this point, I have not seen her for almost ten years. I had to distance myself from her this for the safety of my own children when they were young. So getting this email was hard.

But after dropping our middle child Julie off at Azusa Pacific (intense weekend!) we stopped by her apartment for a couple hours and had lunch together at a local restaurant.

And I thought about Joseph, encountering his brothers after so many years, and the tears that he shed. And I cried too after I saw her because there's something about seeing the person you have forgiven again... ..after you've worked it all through...and put it in God's hands... that puts a kind of poignant closure on the pain, and it shows you that they are just a person too... in need of grace and mercy like everyone else.

And I realized that Joseph in saying "You meant it for evil...God meant it for good." was not just a statement of his own faith in God...it was a statement meant to reassure his brothers that their mistake, as horrible as it was, didn't even come close to the ability that God had to redeem the situation for his glory.

Listen to this scripture again...

"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good...so have no fear; ...in this way he reassured them speaking kindly to them."

Do you hear that. The brother they sold into slavery is comforting *them*, and telling them its ok. Don't be afraid. Cause they had the bigger burden...the guilt of what they had done to Joseph haunted them....and Joseph consoled them...

Since the encounter with my Mom, I have realized that so many years later...I am now called to speak kindly to her.... reassure her that all is well...because she too is afraid. I've reassured her that I'm OK. That God is faithful. That evil did not win in our family. I have been able to communicate that to her for the first time in almost 10 years. She has reached out to me, and only by God's grace and the power of forgiveness, can I now reach back for the first time and reassure her of God's faithfulness to us all.

I wanted you to know this because I don't want you ever to think that I am undermining how hard sometimes this walk of forgiveness is. It's painful...its tough...but its worth everything you've got
Work at it. Pray about it...be committed to learning how to live and lean into forgiveness in your family...
There's nothing more rewarding, and nothing that releases the power of the Holy Spirit in your life more...

It's the message of the cross. And it's the message for our lives today...

I'd like us to go into prayer right now...and let the Holy Spirit bring to your mind anyone who is in your family who is causing you pain, and heartache...maybe their face is before you right now...and you can remember what they did to you...or to someone else you love...and it just is eating at you....So, in the quiet of your own heart hear yourself say the words of Joseph to his brothers who sold him into slavery "You meant it for evil, God means it for good." ...and then add, whether you feel it or not right now, "I forgive you in Jesus name..."

Prayer...