

GOD DOES HAVE A PLAN**Sermon for the 6th mid-week Lenten Service 2022****Genesis 45:1-15**

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon tonight is Genesis 45:1-15: **Then Joseph could no longer hold back his emotions before all who were standing near him and called out, “Make everyone leave my presence!”**

There was no one else standing with Joseph when he told his brothers who he was. ² He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him and the household of Pharaoh heard him. ³ Then Joseph told his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?”

However, his brothers could not answer him because they were terrified at his presence. ⁴ Joseph told his brothers, “Please come closer to me!”

Therefore, they went closer. He said: “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now, however, do not be sad or angry with yourselves for selling me here! For it was to save lives that God has sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been a famine in the land, and there are five more years when there will be no ploughing or harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ So now, it has not been you who have sent me here, but God. He has also made me a father to Pharaoh, master over his entire household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Go up to my father quickly and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph has said: “God has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me immediately! ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen, and you yourself, your children and your grandchildren will be near me with your flocks, your herds and everything else that you have! ¹¹ I shall provide for you there. For there will be five more years of famine. Otherwise you, your family and all who belong to you will lose your property.”’ ¹² Look! Your own eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin can see that it is my mouth that is speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honour given to me in Egypt and about everything that you have seen and bring my father down here quickly!”

¹⁴ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. ¹⁵ Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept over them. After that, his brothers talked with him.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“God has a plan.” I’m sure you’ve heard that before. Maybe someone has said it to you. It often gets spoken in circumstances that are inexplicable or tragic. Much of the time we don’t know what that plan is - or where that plan is taking us, and often that plan seems painful.

As our Lenten journey with Joseph moves closer to its culmination tonight, a theme that’s emerged from this account is *God has a plan*, and that plan is *often completely hidden from us*. We see, hear, and experience one terrible thing, but in, with, and under that one terrible thing, God is doing His thing - which is wonderful. The jealousy and hatred of Joseph’s brothers had led them to do something despicable. Selling their own flesh and blood into slavery in a foreign land was pure evil, but in, with, and under those very same evil circumstances, God was at work, preparing salvation for His people and ensuring the survival of Abraham’s descendants from which the Christ would one day be born.

Joseph’s brothers had unknowingly been a part of God’s plan. Tonight’s reading from Genesis tells of the reunion that those brothers never saw coming, and when it finally happens - when they hear the high-ranking Egyptian official say, **“I am Joseph!”** - they are dismayed, terrified, and unable to speak because their jaws are on the floor. They no doubt expect the worst. But in one sentence Joseph expresses how God’s good plan and the evil plan of his brothers unfolded simultaneously. He says to them, **“do not be sad or angry with yourselves for selling me here! For it was to save lives that God has sent me ahead of you.”**

Joseph told his brothers: *You sold me... but God has sent me*. Which is it? Did Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery, or did God send Joseph down that path? Was Joseph a victim of evil or was he a saviour for the starving world? The most fitting answer to all of those questions is *yes*. It’s not either/or; it’s both/and. It is indeed the wonderful, awesome plan of God.

God has a plan, and tonight’s readings make clear that at the heart of God’s plan is forgiveness. God’s plan moves forward and succeeds because of forgiveness. Joseph’s treatment of his brothers is a profound lesson on the power of

forgiveness. This is what forgiveness looks like. Joseph is now the most powerful man in the world. Before him are the brothers who have betrayed him, down on their knees, guilty of great evil, deserving of death. But what does Joseph do? **“Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept over them.”** Through tear-filled eyes, he forgives them, speaks tenderly to them, and comforts them. He also tells them the good news: *God has a plan.*

What if Joseph hadn't forgiven them? What if Joseph had done what comes so naturally to the sinful nature? What if Joseph had subscribed to the idea that turnabout is fair play - that revenge is a dish best served cold? Or what if he had spoken forgiveness to them but then sent them back home empty-handed to starve? What if he had imprisoned or enslaved them to make them earn their way back into his good graces?

If Joseph doesn't forgive his brothers, then God's plan is imperilled. God's plan to save the whole world, including us, is jeopardised. How will Abraham's Seed secure salvation if the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah comes to a screeching halt because Joseph won't let go of the sins committed against him? If Joseph doesn't forgive, then the Passion of our Lord might never have come to pass.

The crucifixion scene sketched out in the four gospels is not unlike the scene of Joseph and his brothers. The most powerful man in the world, the Son of God, hangs from a Roman tool of torture, beaten and bloody, and fresh pain is felt with every breath. As Jesus looks down and surveys the scene, His disciples have abandoned Him. His Father has forsaken Him. He is surrounded by sinners who hate Him, who mock Him, who eagerly await His death. But Jesus submits Himself to God's plan to save the world. He seeks not revenge on His enemies, but prays for them: *“Father, forgive them! For they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). Jesus sheds His blood and submits to death for all His brothers and sisters, including us. This is what forgiveness looks like. God has a plan - and this is it.

This plan of God for life and salvation had been underway since long before Joseph was born, ever since our first parents ushered sin and its wages into the world. God's plan in Christ was hidden. God's good plan was obscured by the evil plans of men like Pilate and Herod, the scribes and Pharisees, and all who wanted Jesus out of the way. But make no mistake, our sin was the driving force behind the nails. Our sin was the reason for the crucifixion. Still, in, with, and under this terrible thing, God was doing *His thing* - which is wonderful. *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them”* (2 Cor. 5:19).

That is the best news you will ever hear. It means we don't get what we deserve. Like Joseph's brothers with their guilty consciences and their jaws on the floor, we don't get what we have coming because of our sin. Our Brother, Jesus, forgives us. He speaks tenderly to us through the preaching and proclamation of His promises. He comforts us with the cup of salvation. Our beloved Brother comes among us in flesh and blood to serve us and save us.

Flowing from this grand plan of salvation is God's plan for you. Yes, God has a plan for your life. Your life is not a random series of events - actions and reactions, causes and effects - that in the end are mostly meaningless. Far from it! Our baptism declares that God is determined to have His way with us, and His way is always good! We who have been forgiven understand that God's plan also always involves our forgiveness of others. A refusal on our part to forgive those who sin against us, well, that hinders God's plan. We get in the way and imperil God's work when we do not forgive as we have been forgiven. It is better by far to let go of our neighbour's sin and forgive, so that God can do His wonderful work and His plan can proceed.

What comfort it is to know that God has a plan for each of us - a plan that centres our life in the life of our Saviour. The trials and travails of Joseph remind us not to worry when brothers betray you, or when temptation comes calling. When it seems as if much of our life is wasted and worthless, remember Joseph and his years in prison. We cannot know and we cannot see what God is doing or what He is planning. We can only believe. We can only trust that He is working all things for our eternal good, through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And that is everything. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.