

Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28
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Sermon Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
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The Story of Joseph takes up the last 14 chapters of the Book of Genesis. Many scholars see it as the best-written story of the many stories in the Old Testament with many twists and turns and finally a satisfying resolution, the family is reunited and the brothers seek and receive Joseph's forgiveness.

At the end of the story, Joseph says in chapter 50:

You (brothers of mine) meant to harm me, BUT GOD intended it for a good purpose, so He could preserve the lives of many people..."

Joseph is in many ways a Christlike figure, his suffering and abasement, and his final raising up and forgiveness of those who wronged him. However, I would not like to take it too far. Young Joseph was in fact a spoiled insensitive brat.

The context of the story is that Joseph was the youngest child of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob was in love with Rachel and his father in law had agreed that Jacob would work for him for 7 years and then marry Rachel. Rachel's father Laban tricked Jacob into marry his other daughter Leah by devious means and so Jacob worked for another 7 years for Rachel.

The other sons of Jacob were the sons of Leah or concubines, Joseph was the only son of Rachel, at the time – Benjamin was born later. So Joseph was the favoured son of the favoured mother, a truly disastrous situation for family dynamics.

The other 10 sons spent their days and nights away looking after the flocks and herds. One day the seventeen year old Joseph was sent off to see how the brothers were going.

The brothers saw Joseph coming. Their resentments seethed and they plotted a savage revenge. They would kill him and throw his body into a pit. Only the eldest, Reuben, wanted to save his youngest brother, and he thought of a way to delay the murder. He suggested that they just put him a pit alive. He planned to return at night and rescue him. So they stripped Joseph of the special coat his father gave him and threw him in a water cistern.

When Reuben was out of sight, Judah second eldest, talked the others into selling Joseph as a slave to a party of foreign traders who came by with their camel train. They sold the youngster for twelve shekels of silver.

What possibly can this story have to say to us:

It is a story about being lost and found, a story of forgiveness and reconciliation, a very modern story really, or rather a story for the ages.

It could be applied to many, many situations around us in the community today. This story takes us back thousands of years, yet in culturally different patterns it may be happening in our culture. Everything from family rivalries and violence to the way countries relate to each other.

In the Story of Joseph however, the God of the Bible is not an outsider but an insider. God is not like an academic philosopher observing and theorising. God is not simply an idea of the beautiful and noble - and God identifies with the victim. In this case Joseph.

On another occasion, this reached its all-time lowest point:

A carpenter from a small town was considered not worth much compared with the power and status of the religious and political dignitaries.

Like Joseph to his brothers, Jesus was disposable and met his end on a cross.

God is connected with Joseph the slave, Moses the fugitive murderer, Deborah the prophetess, Ruth the foreigner, David the shepherd, Judith the freedom fighter, Hosea the deserted husband, Job struck by calamity and many others.

In the Christian tradition the story of Joseph is a Christ-figuring story and is a story of lost and found, of reconciliation and forgiveness. A story where after a long a tortuous journey there is a resolution.

*It will all be right in the end, and if it's not right then it's not the end!
Quite amusing, but rather trite.*

St Paul says it much better in his letter to the Romans
We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

More of the story of Joseph will unfold next week. But for the moment we have enough to go on with, as we apply our own faith, hope and love.

Like in the story of Joseph when being tossed in the pit and sold into slavery was not the end so the cross was not the end either. For we worship a risen Lord.

In our current situation we endure, the pandemic continues, we cannot see its end and yet we know it will end. This is not a *Pollyanna* statement. Much responsible action and hard work will be needed from us all.

Even though we may feel in the pit at the moment this long, long moment God is with us and his presence will see us through.

There will be freedom like Joseph, there will be resurrection with our Lord Jesus.

Remember the baptism words.

Live as a disciple of Christ:

fight the good fight,

finish the race,

keep the faith. **Amen**