

Trinity United Methodist Church

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Scripture: Genesis 42:1-7, Genesis 45:1-9, Genesis 50:15-21 (NIV)

Genesis 42:1-7: **1** When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?” **2** He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.” **3** Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. **4** But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. **5** So Israel’s sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also. **6** Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. **7** As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he asked. “From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”

Genesis 45:1-9: **1** Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. **2** And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it. **3** Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living? But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. **4** Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! **5** And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. **6** For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. **7** But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. **8** So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. **9** Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay.’

Genesis 50:15-21: **15** When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him? **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions

before he died: **17** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. **18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Sermon

Well, we are at the end of Joseph's story. And tonight we're actually covering nine chapters. I am challenged in preaching this. It is one of my favorite, favorite stories in the Bible. So to review very quickly: Remember, Joseph is the favorite son, and his other brothers are jealous. That jealousy turns to disdain and anger and even murder in their hearts, and they plan on killing him, but end up selling him into Egypt. So he becomes a slave in Egypt, then he's thrown into prison, being falsely accused of rape or making advances on Potiphar's wife. So he's in the dungeon, and then he's raised out after he interprets some dreams, and he's second in command of all Egypt. He interprets Pharaoh's dreams: The seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine, and Joseph has the wisdom to say 20 percent of all the crops will be stored away for this famine.

At this point Joseph has now been given a wife by Pharaoh, Asenath. She is the daughter of a priest, and they have two children. Interesting the names of these children. Manasseh is the first one, and that means "forget." And so Joseph is saying, I've forgotten all my sufferings, all my troubles from before. And then the second son is named Ephraim, which means "twice fruitful," and so he's being blessed in this land. God is with him all through those hard times.

So the story picks up now where the famine is under way and the family secret is still intact. Ten brothers were in on it, and they knew where Joseph really was. Joseph is now in Egypt, and the youngest, Benjamin, doesn't know what's going on. He hears the story that Joseph is dead, because they convince him and his dad and others that a wild animal must have gotten him, as they took his coat and shredded it and put blood on it.

This story takes such winding roads and it goes almost like a roller coaster, up and down. And we see the man of God, Joseph, at the center, trusting in the midst of incredibly difficult times.

So they're hungry. There's famine in Canaan. There's famine in a large area, and they hear that Egypt has food. And so Jacob, Israel, Dad, says: Go down there. And the ten brothers go down to Egypt. Dad doesn't let Benjamin, the youngest, go. He's still playing favorites with his kids. And because Joseph and Benjamin are the sons of Rachel, his favorite wife, they're his favorite sons. So he doesn't want to let Benjamin out of his sight. He's too fearful.

So the ten brothers show up in Egypt, and there is Joseph, distributing food. But Joseph no longer at all looks like a Hebrew. He's an Egyptian culturally. By faith, he's a Hebrew. He believes in Yahweh. But culturally, he's Egyptian. He speaks that language and he's in command of everything down there. And the brothers, ten of them, bow down to Joseph. And Joseph recognizes them, and Joseph, it says, remembers his dreams. The prophetic dreams were fulfilled in that moment. Remember? That they would bow down to him. The sheaves of grain would bow down, and then the sun, the moon and the stars bowed down to Joseph. And here it's happening.

Joseph, though he recognizes them, accuses them of being spies. Of being enemies. Are they enemies? They're his brothers, but they certainly *were* his enemies. And Joseph makes this accusation: "You all are spies, and you've come to check out the land and see where we're vulnerable." But they plead with him and say, "Your servants are honest men, not spies." Are they honest men? They're not honest men. They haven't been honest. There's a family secret that is a story of tragedy, but a story of tragedy that God uses for good.

So Joseph presses in and sees his opportunity to ask them about their family. "Is your father still living?" This story gets me. I don't know about you all, but it gets me. He doesn't know if his dad's alive, and he sees this opportunity—"Is your father still living?" And then he asks, "Do you have another brother?" Benjamin. His younger brother. He hadn't seen him in years. And so they inform him of everything. Joseph presses in and still makes the accusation that they're spies, and they're in prison for three days. And then he makes one of the brothers stay while the nine go with the food back to their family, on the condition that they bring the youngest brother back.

Joseph wants to see his younger brother. The *only* brother who did not betray him. The *only* brother who did not sell him into slavery. That's his condition. "Come back with your youngest brother."

And the writer of Genesis says that the brothers said to each other, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was, and when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen. That's why this distress has come upon us." Reuben replies, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't

listen to me. Now we must give this accounting for his blood.” Guilt has wrapped them up. It’s been years, but they know their guilt, and they feel like God is repaying them.

Then the scripture says, “they did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.” He’s going undercover here. And then it says that Joseph turned away, because he began to weep. But then he came back and spoke to them again, and he had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. Can you imagine the emotions going through Joseph’s heart? He’s listening to them confess their guilt and wrestle with it, but they don’t know who he is.

Years ago I was a substitute teacher up in Fairfax County, and I had a moment where the Latinos in the class were all at one table, still going through English as a Second Language. And I would listen to their conversations. They didn’t know this gringo speaks Spanish. So I listened to one of them that was kind of boastful and a little bit arrogant. And I listened to him sharing with the other students how that day after school, he was going to meet Carlos and beat him up and give him what he deserved. So I just listened to this for a little while, and then at the right moment I said, “Estos planes no anime parecen muy bien.” “*These plans that you’re sharing, they don’t appear to be real good to me.*” And the look on this little boy’s face. Oh my gosh, eyes this big! Learn a second language. It will open doors.

And Joseph is listening in, but he’s playing the role of Egyptian through and through, waiting for the right time to reveal himself. And so he loads their bags with grain and he puts the silver they paid for the grain back in their sacks. And so the brothers, when they get back, minus Simeon, who’s in prison now—they find the silver in their sacks. And they’re again guilt-ridden. “What is this that God has done to us?” They’re frightened. This man in Egypt is powerful. He has the power to take us out, if he wants.

So they tell Dad, Jacob, Israel. They tell him what’s going on, and Jacob won’t let go of Benjamin. Even though that’s the requirement. If you want to get Simeon free, if you want more food, you’ve got to bring Benjamin. And Jacob, Israel, Dad, can’t hear of it. He says, again playing favorites: “His brother is dead, and he is the only one left.” Dads—don’t play favorites with your kids! Moms—don’t play favorites with your kids!

But they ate through all the grain, and there’s no real mention of Simeon. And then Judah steps up and convinces Dad that it’s time to go back. And so Jacob says, okay, send balm and honey and spices and myrrh and pistachios and almonds, and double the silver. And bring that back to this man in Egypt. It’s interesting because Jacob had offered gifts to appease his brother years before, Esau, when Esau wanted to kill him, and Jacob sent all these gifts in advance to hopefully appease his brother, and now he’s doing something very similar.

And so they go back into Egypt. It says when Joseph sees Benjamin, he sends the brothers to his house for lunch. They fear the worst. “Why is this man taking us to his house?” They’re thinking that he’s going to steal their donkeys and harm them. They are carrying tremendous guilt, still. And Benjamin, it appears, still doesn’t know the family secret. So when they get to Joseph’s house, they share with the steward in humility about the silver, and they give double the silver and all the gifts. And the steward says, “It’s all right. Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks. I received your silver.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.

What a mystery these brothers are going through! “God put silver in our sacks? How does that work?” But they’re not in trouble there.

And then Joseph comes and they bow down again low to him, and they give him the gifts, the balm and the honey and the pistachios and the almonds. (I don’t know about you, but pistachios and almonds go a long way with me. That would do it.)

Joseph asks them how they are. And then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?” You see the heart of a son? He’s just dying to know Dad’s okay. But they still don’t know who he is. And then he says, pointing at Benjamin, “Is this your brother?” And they acknowledge he is. And then Joseph says, “God be gracious to you, my son.” And then the writer says, “Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.”

This story gets me. I don’t know about you all, but here’s somebody that’s been so horribly betrayed. And there he is, and they don’t know who he is. And he’s so happy that his youngest brother is there. And the emotions are probably swirling around in his heart. And then they sit down to eat, and the brothers are sat down in their birth order, by age. And they are perplexed, to say the least. And Benjamin receives five times more food than the rest of them. The only brother who didn’t sell him into Egypt.

Then Joseph fills their sacks with grain again. The famine is ongoing. And he puts their silver, again, back in their bags. And then he places his cup into Benjamin’s sack, and off they go, returning to the land of Canaan.

The next day the steward is sent after them, with Joseph accusing them of taking the cup. And the steward tracks them down on their journey, and he says, “Why have you repaid good with evil?” They said, “We haven’t taken anything. If anyone has taken anything, that one will die and the rest of us will be slaves.” The steward says okay. And he searches from the oldest to the youngest, and there is Joseph’s cup in Benjamin’s sack. Can you imagine the terror of these brothers? And they tear their clothes. And they’re brought back to Joseph and they offer themselves as slaves to Joseph. And he says, “No. Only the one who is guilty. The rest of you, go to your father in peace.”

Why does he do this? I think he wants them to know what it feels like, being innocent and yet having to plead for your life. That's what they put *him* through. And Judah again steps up to the plate and he has a plea, telling Joseph the whole story about how Benjamin and the son that is no more are dearly loved by their father. He doesn't say they're the favorites, but the text lends you to believe that's what he's saying. And he says to Joseph, "It would kill our father if Benjamin didn't come back. Take me instead. I offer myself in his place."

Do you see the foreshadowing going on here? This is Judah saying, "My life for his life." Jesus is in the line of Judah.

And so, Joseph, it says, could control himself no longer. And he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence. And so there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And it says he wept so loudly, all of the Egyptians heard him. And then Joseph says, "I am Joseph. Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him because they were terrified at his presence. And then he said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt. Now don't be distressed and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because I was sent to save lives. God sent me here to save lives ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping, but God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

Can you imagine the scene? Can you imagine being one of those brothers? There he is, the one you betrayed. The one you cashed in for money because you didn't like him. You hated him. And there he is, before you, with power over you, and yet saying, *Don't worry. Don't worry.*

And then he throws his arms around Benjamin, and he wept. And Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and they talked for a long time.

Church, this story is phenomenal. They don't deserve mercy. They don't deserve grace. And yet Joseph has the wisdom, because he's in touch with God, and the understanding that God's doing something bigger than his life. His life is up and available to be a blessing to others by God's hand. Even if it means being brought low. Even if it means suffering.

Now, there's some phenomenal parallels in Joseph's story with Jesus' story. A foreshadowing, if you will. Both Joseph and Jesus were objects of envy. The Pharisees and the religious teachers were envious of Jesus and so betrayed him. Joseph, too, was the object of envy. Both were falsely accused. They had done nothing wrong, but the accusations stuck. Both of them were sold for silver, Joseph for 20 pieces and Jesus for

30. And then, Jesus starts his ministry at 30 years old; Joseph starts his service in Egypt as Pharaoh's second in command at 30 years old. They're both counted as sinners: Joseph's in a dungeon, Jesus is crucified between two thieves. They both promise deliverance to a man who is condemned. Jesus says to the thief: "Today you will be with me in paradise. And Joseph said to the cupbearer: "In three days you will be raised up and restored to your place." They both *descend* in order to *ascend*, Joseph into the dungeon and then up to second in command, and Jesus into the grave, descending into the grave, but then risen forevermore. Joseph wept many times, and Jesus wept at Lazarus' grave and also wept over Jerusalem. Tender hearts; this is manly, this is good.

Through their suffering, both of them, many were saved. Joseph hides himself from his brothers. Even though he's right in their midst, they don't recognize him. Do you remember Jesus on the road to Emmaus? Though He's in the midst of the disciples, in their presence, they're kept from recognizing Him. And both are telling something almost too good to be true, but it was true. Joseph reveals himself and says, "Do not be afraid." Jesus showing up resurrected, risen from the dead, showing up and says, "Do not be afraid." Both, they thought were dead, and they were alive. Jesus really was dead, but He is alive forevermore. Joseph, they thought the animal had torn him to pieces, but no. No. He was alive for a purpose.

So the correlations are amazing, and the foreshadowing, the anticipation of Jesus coming is throughout Joseph's life.

And so Joseph sends his brothers back to their father, and the reunion is coming. And they convinced Jacob, Israel, their Dad, that he is alive. And they're sent back with chariots to bring everybody back so they can live in Egypt. And it says "Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father, Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Israel said to Joseph, 'Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.'"

Can you picture the joy of that reunion? A dad, a grieving father, reunited with his son? A son who had been betrayed, reunited with his father?

The next few chapters talk about Israel blessing his sons. He's old, and he dies there in Egypt, but his wish is to be buried in Canaan, and he is. A big, big funeral procession for Israel.

And then, part of the tragedy of the story. Dad is now dead, and the family secret won't be revealed to dad, but the brothers' guilt is not gone, apparently. And it says, "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?'" Their guilt is still there. So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these

instructions before he died. ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph. I ask you to forgive your brothers for the sins and wrongs that they committed in treating you so badly. Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’” When the message came to Joseph, he wept. Why did he weep? Because they don’t believe he loves them. They don’t believe he has forgiven them, and it hurts his heart. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is being done, the saving of many lives. So then don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.”

So here’s a couple takeaways from this phenomenal story. Church, sometimes we’re like the brothers. Sometimes we do things wrong and we keep it a secret rather than confessing and making it right. And sometimes we don’t believe the grace that’s been offered to us. Do you see what they do? They say, “we’re your slaves. We’re your servants.” They’re brothers, they’re not servants. This is an echo, for me, of the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. Do you remember the story? The prodigal son comes back. He’s been a mess. He’s made a mess of his life, and the father forgives him because he was lost and he’s found. He was dead and now he’s alive. But the older brother is horrified by that much grace being given. And he says to his dad as he refuses to come into the party—Dad has to go out and talk to him—“Look, all these years I’ve been slaving for you, and I’ve never disobeyed your orders. You didn’t even give me a goat.” And the father is incredulous. “Everything I have is yours. You never asked for a goat.” “But I’ve been slaving for you.” You see this? The older brother, his relationship with the dad was more one of a servant than a son. He didn’t understand the grace that was there.

And so these brothers aren’t receiving the grace that is there. They don’t believe in the love that Joseph has for them. Sometimes we, with our relationship with God, we don’t believe the grace. The whole book of Galatians is written to the church, and Paul is saying to that church: “You guys started with grace. How are you now moving back to works? Are you right with God because you’ve performed enough and done enough? You’re right with God because of *grace*. Christ died for you. You’re loved as you are. Therefore, give yourselves to God. Don’t give yourselves to God in order that maybe you’ll hit your niceness quotient or your performance will be enough that He’ll love you. He loves you. It’s grace. It’s not by works. So believe in His grace for you.”

And then the second lesson is this: God is the master chess player. You all know about chess champions, right? If any of us played one of these grand masters in chess, we’d have a few moves, but the outcome is already finished before the game starts, correct? They would wrap us up quickly. God is the ultimate, ultimate chess champion. He’s working things towards an end so that there will be a new heaven and a new earth,

a new creation, redemption. And so what they intended for evil, God is working for good. That's how big, that's how great our God is. He can even twist evil back so that it's used for good. He's not the author of that evil, but He'll bring it around.

And so these beautiful words: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." He's working behind the scenes so often.

And so church, in closing: **Believe in the grace that Jesus has given you.** He's died for you. It is finished. All your sins are paid for, even your future ones. That's how it works. That doesn't give us license to go sin at all; it should make us so grateful for His mercy that we just keep drawing more near to Him. And when hard times come in your life, because they will, stay faithful, like Joseph. Stay faithful. God is sovereignly working for your good. I promise you, He has a plan for the planet, and you are a part of that plan. So yield to Him. Yield to Him. *Yield to Him.* Amen.