

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Genesis 45:3–15; Luke 6:27-38**

**Sermon: “Love Your Enemy”**

There Joseph stands, in front of his brothers who’ve fled starvation back home to journey to Egypt, where they’ve heard there was bread to be had, . . . only to find the man holding the loaf to be the brother they had hated and tossed aside like trash.

There they stand, powerless; he, strong and dangerous as a storm. Would he enact revenge, or would he be forgiving? No one would question either decision his word would be obeyed no matter what he said and his brothers, for a moment that felt like a lifetime, thought their fate was hanging in the balance so delicately that maybe a grain of flour could shift it.

They’d come in desperation to Egypt. They’d hoped to find bread. But they’ve found guilt and the end of a story they didn’t realize was still being written. What would Joseph choose to dispense? Life or death? Bread or revenge?

Wouldn't be nice just once to be able to stand in the shoes of these biblical figures. So, we could hear the sound of the silence that follows a stilled storm, that we could see the joy on the face of a healed leper from up so close that it would feel dangerous to be there, that we could stand where the disciples stood that near to Jesus, place our feet in their shoes, and watch God work. But here's the thing: we aren't ready this day to stand in Joseph's shoes. Not yet anyway. And trying too soon to stand in Joseph's shoes, if we aren't ready could lead us astray. And I believe that whether we know it or not, we've longed to be in his place. This place.

And his place is this: Joseph, the de facto ruler of Egypt, one of the most powerful men in the world, stands before his brothers, holding their well-being in his hands, the power to give life or the power to take it away. Clothed in the finest that the world had to offer. His hands are heavy, but not with work or tiredness. Heavy with jewelry. A gold signet ring wraps around a finger on his tanned hand, a signet which means he can make decisions in the Pharaoh's name. Could command his army, sign a treaty, give life and give death with just a word. That ring gives power.

And maybe we don't covet Joseph's power (Some do!), but those who would eschew that might still be inclined to wish for his affluence. Other rings on Joseph's fingers say, "I'm rich enough for this; my life is lavish enough for that." Joseph, he wants for nothing, and those shoes I mentioned earlier, that we aren't ready to stand in they're the best that money could buy. Whatever was fashionable that year in the Nile River Valley, crocodile skin or alligator or whichever might swim there.

And maybe none of that means anything to us; we prefer just power enough over our own lives and concerned with only living simply and humbly. But even if we covet none of those things, here's something I think we've wished before: Joseph sees clearly the plan of God for his life. While his brothers watch his face begging for a tell, Joseph thinks back over a life and sees God's hand in every place, each crevice he tripped on, each darkness he hid in.

In each and every place, he sees the hand and the guiding of God. God has a plan for Joseph, and though we all know that's true for him and for us, Joseph sees it, the plan of God. And wouldn't we like to know what it is for us?

Do you covet that about him? Wouldn't we all like to replace all that anguish and all that stress and all that wondering of "what if" and "maybe I coulda"? Wouldn't we rather sleep soundly, knowing that we stand today exactly where God wants us to be? Wouldn't you wish that you could look back on your life this moment and see God's hand, how he guided you to be the woman you are or the man you are and how he brought you to this moment for a reason?

Maybe you think you do know, but my guess is that if we're being honest with ourselves, we'd have to admit that when we're caught saying that something we're involved in is God's plan, we really mean it's our plan and we're praying it's his too, because God's plan can seem complicated and maddeningly unclear at times for you and for me, but not for Joseph. For Joseph, it's now clear.

The reason, of course, that Joseph's brothers wondered about their fate, standing there when Joseph reveals himself, guilty and desperate as they were, is because many years ago they were so mad at Joseph, and so frustrated that he was their father's favorite, that they decided to kill him.

They tossed him into an empty pit, and while they plotted how to murder him, they found what struck them as a better option. They sold him into slavery, dragged behind a cart off to Egypt, hands likely bound, sand burning his feet.

Joseph then worked in the home of a rich Egyptian, as a servant. Potiphar was his name. Soon enough, Joseph caught the attention of Potiphar's wife, but he didn't return her attention, choosing character and honor over comfort or desire. She wasn't fond of being turned down, and so she lied and destroyed his name and any shred of reputation he might have had left. And so, he who was once the favorite of the father had lost everything. His family, his freedom, his reputation.

There he was, sitting in prison. Maybe etching the days in the wall, who knows? But he makes friends of any he can around him, and he guides them by means of a God-given wisdom and ability to interpret their dreams and see the future. When, as he advised them, they move up and out of that dank dark place, sadly the one who returns to Pharaoh's service neglects any memory of him.

All it would've taken was a mention to the boss, and he might be free. But he forgot him there. Abandoned, despised, his character crucified, and forgotten in a prison that might as well have been a tomb. But for some odd reason, even in the dark, Joseph always seemed to sense the flicker of light and hope, so he didn't give up the faith.

And one day he finds himself standing in front of Pharaoh himself, the most powerful man in the world, and Joseph's gift makes him indispensable. He sees these times of goodness as moments when laurels shouldn't be rested upon but rather squirreled away because a downturn was coming. He led an amazing food program in Egypt where the plenty of today was stored for the coming days of none.

And soon enough, who should come knocking to Egypt? With longing in their mouths and hunger in their stomachs? None other than those brothers who began this whole course of pits and prisons and false allegations of impropriety. "Joseph, remember us when you come into your kingdom! For the sake of our father, pity us and help us!"

And Joseph, what will he do? Well, he gives them life, and the scales didn't tip that way by just a grain or two; they were fully tipped, by mercy. And more than mercy, it was the result of Joseph looking back on all the places he'd been and realizing that all of it led to now. "You needn't fear me," Joseph says. "I'll take care of you. What you did, you meant for evil, but God, he meant it for good. God sent me here to preserve life," Joseph says, "not to take life away."

And the reason why it's important to remember all this, as Joseph remembered all this, is because if we were to desire to stand in his shoes too soon, we might not recall that hardship has first calloused his feet. Beatings and imprisonments that they've caused him to limp. Likely under those robes are the scars of slavery.

And that isn't just the cost of knowing God's plan; it's the steps taken to live God's plan. And the necessary hurts to take him from a bratty child who thought he held the world in his hands to an instrument of life in God's hands.

All of which is to say that if we wish to know as Joseph knows, to know God's plan for us, to stand with him in this moment when all things make sense, and we see God's weird and complicated way of working on us to bring good, we need to know that only years of struggle gave him the eyes to see, in faith and with character, what God was doing.

In our eyes, so many times Joseph could have claimed victimhood. Life and those who were supposed to care for him had beaten him down. But instead, Joseph chose to wait patiently for the day when God's victory would be revealed to him. That's faith and character at work there.

And if you squint when you watch Joseph limp victoriously through life, you might be reminded of another who was despised by his brothers, the favorite of the Father. Who entered the pit and proclaimed in prison, who had his righteous character publicly crucified along with the rest of him, and who chose to give life instead of death, to give his bread for our hunger, and offers mercy rather than revenge, who tips the scales in our favor by his favor.



And, of course, he asks nothing of us who've been the recipients of that grace other than the impossible, which is to forgive others as he forgives us. (No one forgives as perfectly as he does!) And as wounded as we'll be from forgiving, from laying ourselves and how we feel down for another, in the end we'll be able to hold our heads up high, because through the agony of it all, like Joseph, in Christ, we'll be living God's real plan for us. Not one of climbing ladders toward the top, but one of lying at the bottom of the pit, with trust in our heart and a patience born of faith, that God can work through whatever mess today brings.

Amen.

"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,  
<sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.