

“But God Meant It for Good” Genesis 50:15-21 Trinity 4 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today’s Old Testament reading is one of the toughest lessons to get straight. It flies in the face of our emotions, our natural reactions, and our reason. It is the lesson of God’s care and providence. It should be part of our thinking by the time we make it to our age, but it is often not. In our society, because the Word is free and the right to worship is so common, the devil had to come up with another stratagem to hinder faith. This time he used wealth and ease and comfort and free time. He accustomed us to our comforts and gave us a sense of entitlement, and then when anything goes wrong, we feel it all the more acutely. Our theme this morning is, but God meant it for good.

Joseph is one of the true heroes of the faith. He is taken by his older brothers when he is just 17. He is first tossed into a dry pit to die, and then they sell him into slavery. He is taken to Egypt and sold in the slave market. Then, in whatever circumstances he finds himself, he simply does good and right and does the work appointed to him. And because of his steadfast faith and faithfulness, God is with him and blesses everything he does. Before long he has worked his way up to head of his master’s house, second only to Potiphar himself.

Then Potiphar’s wife is attracted to him, and tries to seduce him, and, failing that, she gets him thrown in prison. One day, after several

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years of imprisonment, he interprets dreams for some of the more important prisoners, only to be forgotten when the interpretation proves true, and the cupbearer is returned to his original post. He languishes in prison for another two years.

Finally, when he is thirty years old, Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh, and is made the highest ranking officer in the court of Pharaoh, second only to the Pharaoh himself. And you know the story of how he saved the food and rescued his family, and brought them to Egypt. His goodness and holiness cost him just as dearly at times as it brought him success. He had done nothing wrong, but His brothers had sold him into slavery and told his father that he had been torn to pieces by a wild animal. As our text unfolds, Jacob, his father, has died and his brothers are facing the reality of what they did, and what they deserve, and what Joseph has the power to do to them. They come to Joseph pleading for their lives – dishonestly even at this point, or so it seems. Joseph, on the other hand deals with them in dignity and faith, as he always seems to do everything. What a hero of the faith!

Then he teaches his brothers, and us, the truth that whatever we may face, and whatever God may put us through, God meant it for good! He said, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to

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bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” It didn’t matter who did it or why, Joseph knew that God’s hand was behind it all. The evil they did was still evil. They were still accountable for their actions, but Joseph understood God can take the evils we do and turn them for good, using our wickedness to accomplish His holy will!! And so, Joseph forgave them instead.

The same thing is still true today. How do I know? Well, for one thing, God never changes. If He did this back then, He will do it today. Secondly, God tells us in His Holy Word that He is with His holy people to bless us and keep us and work His holy will through us and for us and in us in this world of sin and trouble and pain.

So when people turn on us, and do evil to us, and events conspire against us and cause us frustrations, pains, fears, and troubles, we may take comfort and be confident in the truth that God is at work none-the-less. He works through events and people – even the wickedness and evil of people around us – to put us in places and situations where He will use us for His purposes.

Most of the time God’s use of our circumstances is not as noteworthy to the world, we may not even know what God is doing, but He is there to bless us, and to protect us, and to work His good will

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in all things -- even things that are not good or pleasant. And what is the will of God for us? Our salvation.

And like Joseph, we are to be holy. The Bible tells us so. We have the example of Joseph. We have the example of Jesus. What Christ endured was not good or pleasant, but it was by the will and hand of God, even though evil men did their worst. But God meant it for good. And Jesus prayed for their forgiveness, even as they killed Him.

Because of that great evil, because they put the very Son of God to death, though innocent, you and I are forgiven. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for Good! Your sins, whatever they may be, have been paid for. You are forgiven! He that believes and is baptized shall be saved!!

Now, you might want to ask me, “How can we tell when God is using the wickedness of people around me for good?”, or “How can I tell what good God is doing?” There are two answers. How can we tell when? When troubles come and we face hardships, God is there and will turn all things for good according to His holy purposes. He tells us that in His Word, in Romans 8:28.

How can we tell what good God is doing? The answer is, you cannot necessarily, any more than Joseph could. God doesn't ask us to figure out what He is doing. He asks us to trust in Him and to walk by

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faith. The lesson is not that we should be patient and forgiving when we can see what God is accomplishing. The lesson is to do what is right and holy – to live out our faith, and trust God to do what He has so often promised He will do – bless us, protect us, and bring us to eternal life. Our concern is not primarily with what God is doing or what those other people are doing. Our concern is with our life and our faith and our forgiving others.

Through Jesus, God has taken our sins and used them for our blessing – calling us children of God. He has made more of us and promised us more than we may have known if there were no sin. That doesn't make sin good, or even desirable, but it shows God to be the great and wise and loving Father He truly is. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.