

Genesis 45:1-15
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

7th Sunday After Epiphany, Year C
Midway Presbyterian Church
February 20, 2022

God Sent Me

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

Our Old Testament Lesson from Genesis provides a key episode in the Joseph story. Our lesson will articulate how God's hand was underneath the events in the life of this eleventh of twelve sons of Jacob. God mysteriously worked through the hostility of his brothers—to bring good out of evil. Listen to these words from Genesis 45:1-15...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

As in our Old Testament Lesson for this Seventh Sunday After Epiphany, the wonder and power of God's providence transforms a defeated present into a hopeful future, here in the resurrection. Listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 and 42-50...

Sermon

No doubt many of us learned the story of Joseph many years ago, perhaps in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. It's a story of avarice and greed, jealousy and sibling rivalry, lust, politics, and palace intrigue. But it's much more than that. Let's hear it again.

One day when Joseph was seventeen years old and out pasturing the flocks with his brothers, he saw four of them do wrong. When he told his father what they had done, they were not happy. Joseph was Father Jacob's favorite child, because he was the son of his old age. And when Jacob made him a beautiful coat of many colors, his brothers were jealous.

Furthermore, the boy had dreams that he conveyed to his brothers, which seemed to make Joseph greater, better, and wiser. And they hated him all the more. So they decided to get rid of the dreamer. They were ready to kill him, but brother Reuben said, no, let's not kill him, but cast

him into a pit in the wilderness, Reuben intending to come back and rescue Joseph. And thus was Joseph stripped of his beautiful coat and thrown into an empty pit where there was no water.

But then a company of merchants came by on camels. They were Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt to sell rich spices and perfumed gum. Well, brother Judah thought, “Now we can get rid of Joseph and make money at the same time.” So they pulled him out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. And to conceal the event they took his coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of a slaughtered goat. Then they took the coat to Father Jacob, who interpreted the blood-stained coat to mean that his dear son Joseph had been slain by a fierce animal. And Jacob mourned for many days.

Well, after a long, dusty journey, the Ishmaelites arrived in Egypt with Joseph. There were dark-skinned people there who spoke a different language. There were large cities, beautiful temples, mighty pyramids, and the great Nile River. There Joseph was sold to an officer of the king’s army. But the Lord was with him, and he became successful in the house of his Egyptian master, Potiphar, who made him overseer in his house.

Now Joseph was a handsome young man, and day after day Potiphar’s wife Zuleika (ZOO luh kuh) invited Joseph to lie with her. Yet Joseph refused. But, as the saying goes, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” So, she took Joseph’s garment and called to the men of the household that Joseph had left it when he had tried to seduce her.

When she told Potiphar the same story, he ordered Joseph to be put in prison. But even there the Lord was with him, and the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. And one night two of the king’s officers, the chief cup bearer and the chief baker, who had been imprisoned by the king, had troubling dreams. But Joseph was able to interpret the dreams for them.

Later, Pharaoh had two dreams of abundance followed by scarcity. And Joseph, now thirty years old, was able to interpret the dreams for Pharaoh. Thereby, did Pharaoh make Joseph ruler over all the land of Egypt. He dressed him in royal robes and gave him a chariot, and people bowed before him. Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian girl named Asenath, the daughter of a priest, to be his wife.

But none of this success changed the heart of Joseph. He was still kind and fair to all. And day after day, he gathered food to be stored up for the years of famine. And during this time, God blessed Joseph with two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And Joseph was grateful to God for all his blessings.

Now, when the seven years of plenty had passed, the years of trouble began. Nowhere in all of Egypt would grain grow. When people needed food, they came to Joseph. Joseph opened the storehouses that had been filled during the years of plenty and sold food to the Egyptians. But the famine was not limited to Egypt; it also took its toll on surrounding countries. And from near and far people came begging Joseph to sell them corn lest they die of hunger.

Now the land of Canaan was also hurt by the great famine, and people worried about how they would survive. And father Jacob, having heard that there was corn in Egypt, sent his sons to go there and buy food. But Jacob, having lost his son Joseph, kept the youngest son, Benjamin, at home.

Of course, the brothers had no idea that Joseph now sat on a throne and dressed like a prince. It had been more than twenty years since the ten older brothers had sold Joseph into slavery. But like everyone else, they went to Joseph to buy food.

When his brothers bowed before him, Joseph recognized them at once. He remembered his dreams and knew they had come true. And thus it was clear why God had let his brothers sell him into slavery.

Joseph wanted to know if they had changed. So he pretended not to know them and accused them of being spies. He wanted to know if they cared more for their father's happiness now than they did when they threw him into the pit. To prove they were not spies, Joseph would keep one of them (Simeon) in prison and send the other nine back to Father Jacob in Canaan with food. Then they were to return with their youngest brother. It was then revealed that they were sorry for what they had done years ago to brother Joseph.

Well, the famine continued. The brooks dried up. The wells got more shallow day by day. And the food Jacob's sons had brought back from Egypt was almost gone. Jacob said they must go again and buy more corn. But they said that without bringing Benjamin with them, they would not be able to buy any more. So finally, the father agreed to let Benjamin go with them. They took rich spices and perfumes, wild honey and nuts, and twice as much money as before. When they got there, Joseph graciously welcomed them. A lavish meal was provided. And it wasn't long before Joseph revealed his identity. He said,

“I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.”

...“And the Lord was with him.”

...“God sent me”

...“God made me a father to Pharaoh.”

...“God made me lord of all Egypt.”

It turns out that the main character in this story is not Joseph, but God.

Peter Marshall was born in 1912 in Coatbridge, Lanarkshire, Scotland, a poverty-stricken coal mining community, where he was raised by his mother and stepfather. As a lad, Peter loved the sea and wished to work on a ship when he grew up. As a young man, he was once walking home across the moors. The night was black and eerie. Suddenly he heard a voice call, "Peter!" And there was real urgency in the voice. Peter stopped and asked, "Yes, who is it? What do you want?" He took a few more steps and heard the voice again, this time with even more urgency. "Peter!" So he stopped dead still and fell to his knees, only to discover that he was on the brink of an abandoned stone quarry. Just one more step and he would have fallen to his death.

Peter Marshall believed that God had saved him for some great purpose. There were other similar experiences in his life. Survival compelled him to dedicate his life to full-time Christian service. So he began working double-shifts to save enough money to go to school in America. Once here, he again worked very hard to save enough to pay for divinity school. Upon graduating summa cum laude from Columbia Theological Seminary, he was called to serve as pastor at a rural church in Covington, Georgia.

His sermons were well-received, and soon, people were coming from near and far. After a brief pastorate there, Marshall accepted a call to Atlanta's Westminster Presbyterian Church. There he met his future wife, Catherine Wood, then a student at Agnes Scott College.

Shortly after their marriage, Marshall became pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, where they had one son, Peter John Marshall, who followed his father into the Presbyterian ministry. A year later Peter was appointed as US Senate Chaplain, serving until his sudden death of a heart attack just over two years later, at age 46. God had brought this young man to great good in the face of imminent disaster.

Yes, behind all the events of Joseph's life, God was at work to bring good out of evil. To see that his promise to Abraham could be carried forward. That he would create of Abraham a great nation. He would be blessed and through him all the nations would be blessed. And in the fullness of time, God sent his only begotten Son, and the promise was fulfilled.

And what God did in the life of Joseph, and Jesus, and Peter Marshall, is what God can do today. He can transform a curse into a blessing. Just as he changed the horrible crucifixion of his Son into new and eternal life through the resurrection. The physical body is transformed into a spiritual body. The perishable takes on the imperishable. And then we will see

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Cor. 2:9)

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