

God is Making It Count

Genesis 45:1-15, Matthew 5:7

Following last week, we continue to hear the story of Joseph in our Old Testament Lesson. Joseph was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, who was also named Israel. Joseph was Jacob's favorite son and a tattletale to his father about his brothers. He told his night time dreams to his family that his parents and siblings had bowed down before him. Being infuriated and disgusted by Joseph, his brothers plotted together and sold him to Egypt as a slave.

In Egypt, Joseph lived a life like a rollercoaster ride - going up and going down. He was once thrown into prison because of a false accusation made against him. Later on he was taken out from prison and became the head of the food-storage program in the entire land of Egypt since he interpreted Pharaoh's disturbing night time dreams. Based on the dreams, Joseph prepared Egypt for 7 years of famine, which followed 7 years of abundant harvests.

When the famine struck Egypt and its surrounding area, people who lived around Egypt came to purchase grain in Egypt. Among them were Joseph's own brothers from Canaan, sent by their father.

Today's Old Testament reading begins with the scene where Joseph, now Pharaoh's top official, met with his own brothers, who came to Egypt to buy grain second time. They had not recognized Joseph as their younger brother, whom they had sold as a slave into Egypt.

Joseph tested his brothers for honor, honesty and family loyalty with rather complicated schemes the first time they came for grain to Egypt and this time also. In the last test, Judah, one of Joseph's brothers, to spare his father's anguish, offered himself as a slave in exchange for Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother born from the same mother, Rachel. At that moment, Joseph was overcome with emotion and could no longer control himself in front of all his attendants. He ordered them to leave the room... then broke down and wept.

"I am Joseph," he said to his brothers, "Is my father still alive?" They were dumb struck and terrified. He told his brothers to come closer to him and said. "I'm your brother Joseph! The one you sold into slavery. Now don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me. God sent me before you to make sure you'd survive and to rescue your lives in this amazing way. You didn't send me here; it was God who made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler of the whole land of Egypt."

Joseph embraced and kissed each brother and wept.

He sent his brothers back home with gifts and made an arrangement to bring his father and his entire family in Canaan to live with him in Egypt.

Let's focus on the words Joseph said to his brothers. He said:

“**God** sent me before you to make sure you'd survive and to rescue your lives in this amazing way.” This is Joseph's interpretation of all the bad things that had happened to him and in his life. Also this is his testimony for God's presence behind them all.

Notice that he **didn't** say that **God** caused his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery so that later he might save his entire family.” Rather he said simply, “God sent me here and led me to this position to save my family.” God does not cause evil to be done to people.

Though it was his own brothers who sold him into slavery, God did not forsake Joseph and brought something good out of the sufferings and hardships he had endured. This is Joseph's testimony to God's work in his life. This is his message to us.

If a theological terminology is used, this is God's redemptive work in our lives. God works to redeem the bad things that happen to us and desires to bring something good and beautiful in the end.

What happened in Charlottesville, Virginia, over a week ago, was a tragedy. Heather Heyer, who was in a peaceful protest for justice, was mowed down by a car driven by a man who claimed to be a white nationalist.

At Heather's memorial service, her mother spoke to the people who gathered. “They tried to kill my child to shut her up. Guess what, you just magnified her.” Then she said, “I'd rather have my child, but gully, if I've got to give her up, we are going to make it count.”

God is making it count. God made the sufferings and hardships Joseph had in Egypt count. God made the tears I shed count many times in my life.

Has God made your sadness, trials and challenges count? Has He or has She?

I hope and pray that “the bad things or experiences” you've had will be made to count in the end, if they haven't yet. I hope and pray that something good or something meaningful maybe found in the end.

When Joseph met his older brothers in the Pharaoh's court, he could have taken revenge on them, holding on to his anger. Or he could have bragged about his powerful position in Egypt or could have proudly told his success story. He could have said, “See I told you that you would bow down before me. The night time dreams of my youth came true.”

Instead, he said, “Don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me here; You didn't send me here; it was God who made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler of the whole land of Egypt.”

Joseph had grown psychologically, emotionally and spiritually, hadn't he? His growth or, we might say, the healing that had taken place in him itself is God's redemptive work, isn't it? He was no longer a pampered and spoiled brat. He did not grow to be a man imprisoned by his own anger. He **grew** to be a man who could see God's hand in his life and humbly say that it was **God** who made him the right man of the Pharaoh. He grew to be a man who brought his entire family in Canaan to Egypt to live with him, including his own brothers who had conspired against him.

His growth and healing itself is something good and beautiful that came out of his painful experiences - something that was made counted -- God's redemptive work.

The mystery of God's redemptive work in our lives is often illustrated as embroidery. We only see a meaningless mass of tangled threads when we see the back of embroidered cloth. When we turn it over after **many hours** of embroidering, we see the finished design in the end.

May God give us patience to wait on God to see the full design of embroidery of our life. Let us trust in God, who desires true peace, joy and hope in our lives.