



St. Michael's Church

CHARLESTON, SC
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2021

JOSEPH IS SOLD INTO SLAVERY

GENESIS 37: 17B-20, 23-28, 31-36
PSALM 55: 1-17; JOHN 21:15-19

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

Well, it was like a 7 day Jewish Wedding! Over the past week, my family and I were celebrating my father's 90th birthday and 60th Ordination Anniversary to the Priesthood, and I preached yet another retirement sermon for him... the number of which I have lost count. Up to last week, my father was full time Priest in Charge of a church in Rhode Island and at the age of 90 decided to slow down a bit and join the staff of a nearby church. I fully expect him to come out of retirement soon to lead another church!

But oh we had fun. All my 6 siblings and I and our families including a Jewish relative, rented one BIG house, 16 of us there, it was like a Big Chill week, New England style! But it was the time between the big events...as we recounted story after story from our childhood, stories of joy and happiness, stories of sadness, and even stories of betrayal.

Betrayal is different from sheer deception because to be betrayed, it means you must have been friends or family first. Which makes betrayal second only to estrangement as the saddest word in the English language. I think of David in Psalm 55:

If it was an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it;
But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.
We used to take sweet counsel together
within God's house we walked in the throng.

David writing here about his own flesh and blood, his own son Absalom betraying him in battle! Yes, betrayal within families is most painful.

So..this sermon is for the betrayed, the betrayed in marriage, family, jobs, and friendships.

As we continue our Fall preaching series from Genesis, we see a trail of betrayal in the family of God. Adam and Eve betraying God. Cain betraying Abel. Jacob betraying Esau. In today's reading from Genesis 37, Jacob in fact, goes from betrayer to one who is betrayed. Betrayed by his own sons.

Time now to air out some dirty family laundry in Jacob's family lineage. Jacob had 13 kids, 12 sons and one daughter, all by 4 different women. What a family reunion that would be! The 12 sons of Jacob would become heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. First there was Reuben, but Reuben forfeits first born rites after betraying his father by having an inappropriate relationship with his dad's mistress. And some people say the Bible is boring! After that fall from grace, Jacob passes his birthright to Joseph, his favorite son. Why the favorite? Joseph's mother Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife! So the birthright passes to the 11th child! If that's not felt betrayal to the elder siblings....

Jacob takes this favoritism to a whole new level by giving that famous coat of many colors to Joseph. The brothers are red with rage for it wasn't just any coat. Coats like these in the ancient day were so valuable they were even given as security for loans! And the coat Joseph receives from dad is finer than most had ever seen....long sleeved, all the way down to the ankles, and full of color! The robes the brothers had? Short sleeved, short waisted, and made for workers.

Now truth be told, Joseph doesn't make it better for himself. He has no self-awareness, as proven by the fact that he tells his dad and brothers..."I had several dreams, and in them I had visions of you working for and bowing down to me." Ohh Joseph...Clearly you never read Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence people!"

So, in our reading from Genesis 37, the brothers leave Joseph to feed their flocks about 50 miles away. And oddly, Big Daddy Jacob eventually sends Joseph to check on them. Strange because wouldn't you think Jacob would know that would produce a train wreck? Sure enough! The brothers say, "Here comes fancy pants dreamer, let's kill him and throw him into a cistern." And so the brothers run to Joseph, and violently strip him of his coat and throw him in. Now, ancient cisterns were basically underground reservoirs of water shaped like a bottle complete with a narrow neck, meaning there was no escape. No foot or hand holds. And there Joseph sits...in the valley of the shadow of death.

Have you been there? Betrayed with no way out? One moment Joseph is at the top of his game, and the next moment betrayed-stripped and thrown into hell. One moment Joseph has no needs; the next moment he is in an agony of needs,

Meanwhile on top of ground, the Bible says the brothers, after they throw ol' favorite into the pit...have lunch! Let's kill our brother, oh, did you hear that?

My tummy is growling. Time to eat! I mean such callousness! Important because too often we can romanticize the past. Back in the old days, people were better, more moral, sinless! Joseph's brothers reveal that sin is...TIME-LESS. There was no golden age. It was Oscar Wilde who said:

The only difference between a saint and sinner is that every Saint has a past and every Sinner, has a future.

If you disagree with this, listen to what happens next. As they're eating lunch, Jacob's son number 4 has a brainstorm. Judah says wait a minute, we could make cash if we sold Joseph into slavery! We would have a guaranteed income and we wouldn't have to tell dad we killed the golden child! And sure enough, moments later a caravan heading for Egypt comes by and Joseph is rescued by the hands of his brothers, or so he thought. No, the brothers lift him from the pit, only to betray him a second time by selling Joseph into slavery! Double betrayal!

My dear friends, have you ever been betrayed? If so, doesn't Genesis 37 provide perspective? The betrayal of abuse by a family member? Betrayal at the hands of a co-worker? Betrayal from the hand of a friend. Felt Betrayal from God Himself! I was on the phone recently with a young woman who had lost her last parent, and between sobs she said: "I am so angry with God! How could God do this to me?"

My friends, it's in these painful periods in the pit of betrayal that each of us comes to a fork in the road where we have two essential choices. 1 fork, 2 choices. We can turn this way and go dark...or turn that way and go deep. Dark or Deep. Going dark, we can literally shut it down, live an angry, victim-filled-life of unforgiven isolation and reject God. We can do that. Or we can go deep, deep into the arms of Jesus, saying "Lord I don't understand, but I still trust you." 1 Fork, 2 choices.

Joseph hits that fork, we don't know exactly how he responds, but we do know this. There is no record of Joseph from the pit of a cistern or the pit of slavery saying...Why me. Nope, never did. Betrayal is part of the fallen nature of humanity, our broken-ness. Betrayal and sin are time-less.

So today I need you to know three critical things. The first is this. If you've been betrayed, you're not alone. If you are the betray-ED, you're not alone. The life of the betrayed is as old as time itself going all the way back to Genesis. If you are the betray-ER, know this, you're not alone. Satan will speak into your ear and say: there is no hope for you, You're done, You don't deserve to live. One such betrayer is Peter, the very own disciple of Jesus. John 21 tells that story. Peter betrays Jesus 3 times!

So my dear friends, at that fork in the road, you are not alone. Joseph Betray-ED. Peter a Betray-ER. Jesus betrayed by Peter and countless others who abandoned and put Him on the cross! You are not alone.

Second, God redeems betrayed circumstances. God may not cause every betrayal but He will never waste a hurt. Which takes us back to Joseph.

That caravan heading to Egypt sells Joseph to a guy named Potiphar, the captain of the guards of Pharaoh. All of a sudden this is when redemption begins to take hold! It is in Egypt where Joseph despite more imprisonments and betrayals would rise to the highest positions in the Egyptian Government! Going from PRISONER TO PRINCE! And yes, his dreams do come true as his brothers in a famine, are forced to come to Egypt, and without knowing it bow down to Joseph for food!

Several chapters later in Genesis, Joseph will say to his brotherly betrayers: God made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of his house and ruler over the land of Egypt. Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good in order to preserve our people." God redeems betrayal. As Ken Boa said last week, what God allows, He redeems! God uses the evil deeds of those brothers to accomplish His plan of salvation to keep alive a People, out of whom Jesus the Messiah would be born! As Peter Kreeft puts so succinctly: If those brothers didn't betray Joseph, no Jew on earth would be alive today.

God redeems the betrayed. And You are not alone. Which lastly leads to this: Whether you are the BETRAY-ED or the BETRAY-ER, allow Jesus to give you the strength to reverse the curse of BETRAYAL. Go back with me to John 21.

Jesus proves that every BETRAYER can be forgiven and redeemed. How do I know this? For each of the three times Peter betrays Jesus, Jesus after the resurrection in John 21 asks Peter three times, Do you love me? The invitation by Jesus to Peter to love three times drowns out the echoes of betrayal that haunt Peter. Jesus asking three times reverses the BETRAYAL OF THE three denials! Jesus reverses the curse of betrayal! It's what He still does!

I love that Highway sign above Storrow Drive in Boston that says Reverse Curve. When the Red Sox were playing in the 2004 World Series, someone spray painted over it...Reverse the Curse!" That's what Jesus does for Peter! It's what Jesus does for us. He gives the strength to reverse the effects of betrayal through forgiveness.

- Lord if I've been the betrayER: through your Holy Spirit forgive me
- Lord, If I've been the betrayED, give me the strength through the Holy Spirit to forgive.

My dear friends, no matter how dark your circumstance, God is still in control as he over-rides the evil deeds of people to accomplish his plan of salvation.

- You are not alone.
- God will redeem and take you from PRISONER TO PRINCE!
- Jesus will give you the strength to Forgive and be forgiven, let him.

Finally this morning, the story of Robert THE Bruce of Scotland. In the 14th century, he was leading his men in battle to gain independence from England. Near the end of the conflict, the English want to capture Bruce to keep him from the Scottish crown. So they put Bruce's very own bloodhounds on his trail. When the bloodhounds get close, Bruce's attendant cries out: "We are done for. They're on our trail." Bruce then heads for a stream flowing through the forest, plunges in and wades upstream a short distance. Within minutes, the hounds, tracing his steps, come to the bank but can go no farther. The trail...broken. The stream had carried the scent away.

Betrayal is like those barking dogs chasing us. But a stream flows, red with the blood of Jesus. The trail of betrayal is broken by the precious blood of Christ. Where no sin-hound of betrayal can touch us. Amen.