

FRESH START - JOSEPH - A NEW HOME
A SERMON BASED ON GENESIS 45:1-15
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2018
10:00 a.m.

Joseph's father Jacob, Israel, was very nearly a broken man.

The pain in his life continued to build,

and it was building to a point

where he didn't think he could take it anymore.

Many years before,

his sons had returned from the fields with the devastating news,

that his favourite son, the son of his cherished wife,

his first love, Rachel

his beloved Joseph,

had been killed by wild animals.

His sons brought him the special coat he had made for Joseph.

It was covered in blood.

What he didn't know, which would may have broken him more,

was that it was those very brothers

who got rid of the favourite son

selling him off into slavery, only because the oldest

Reuben, convinced them to spare his life.

Then his beloved Rachel,
while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, died.
The woman Jacob most loved was gone,
but he at least had Benjamin.

Years later there was a famine.

In order to survive,
he sent the ten older boys to Egypt to buy grain.

But he kept Benjamin with him.

He was not going to lose another of his beloved Rachel's children.

His sons returned with grain.

However, they returned without Simeon.

They explained that the ruler they dealt with,
accused them of being spies.

Said they had come to scout out Egypt's weaknesses.

This ruler told them that to prove they were not spies,
they would have to bring this younger brother they claimed to have,
they would have to bring him to Egypt,
to validate their story.

In the meantime they said to their father,
the ruler is keeping Simeon in prison.

Jacob slouched with the weight of the news.

He became angry with them,

‘You have deprived me of my children.

Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more.

Now you want to take Benjamin.

Everything is against me!”

Reuben tried to reason with his father.

“I will leave both of my sons with you while I take Benjamin

to go and get Simeon.

If I don’t bring Simeon back, you can put my sons to death.”

Jacob refused.

“My son will not go down there with you.

His brother is dead and he is the only one left.

If harm comes to him on the journey,

you will bring my grey head down to the grave in sorrow.”

So they left Simeon there in jail in Egypt.

The famine continued.

The grain they had purchased ran out.

They were once again without food.

They were forced into another trip to Egypt, or starve.

Jacob commanded his sons to go and buy them more food.

The sons knew that they had to bring Benjamin with them.

Jacob had to be convinced and cajoled.

He continued to hesitate, but his family were starving.

So finally, with gifts to appease this ruler who had been so harsh,

the sons returned to Egypt,

this time with Benjamin.

Jacob remained home and worried.

Jacob continued to reflect on how everything was against him,

on his loss of Joseph, of Simeon, now perhaps Benjamin,

on how all his sons were now in Egypt,

and there was famine threatening his household.

He felt betrayed, abandoned and alone.

How was this in any way the promise of God?

In Egypt the brothers had been brought to a feast.

Simeon had been released and sitting in front of this ruler,

the brothers had the most stunning experience of their existence.

This powerful ruler from Pharaoh's inner circle said to them,

'I am Joseph. I am your brother Joseph.

I am the one you sold into Egypt.

Don't be distressed or angry with yourselves.

Hurry back to my father,

bring him with you.

You shall live in the land of Goshen and be near me.

I shall provide for you.

I've been waiting to see you again for a long time.

God sent me ahead to prepare a place for you, to save you.

You sold me into Egypt.

God sent me ahead of you to save you, to provide a remnant.

There can be very different perspectives on the same event.

There are difficult journeys we take.

Journeys through loss, journeys through danger.

Journeys through feelings of betrayal, abandonment and of being alone.

Jacob had a painful and frightening journey as well.

He struggled to see the destination over the horizon.

It would have been difficult to trust God.

Jacob never dreamed of a reunion with his beloved Joseph.

There is pain all around us.

There is pain within us.

I have yet to meet a single person,

who when they open up their lives,

does not have a story of pain.

A loss.

Of a child, of a spouse, of a parent,

of a job, of a marriage, of a friendship.

An injury.

To the body, to the heart, to the spirit.

A burden.

brought from the past, carried in the present,

weighing down the future.

Worries.

that hurt because their constant gnawing,

leave a person feeling raw and exposed all the time.

I have yet to meet a single person who does not have a story of pain.

A story that makes it difficult for them to trust God.

It is probably the most asked question in the Christian faith.

If God is good, if God is loving, if God is all powerful,

then why am I experiencing this difficulty?

Why God?

Why has what I loved, or what I needed been taken from me?

Why was there no defence provided,

to spare me from this wound?

Why isn't my load made lighter?

Why can't my future be assured?

The pain is all around us.

It is within us.

There are so many books and poems and blogs

asking and trying to answer,

What are you doing God?

What are you doing?

Genesis 45.

It is probably one of the more powerful and profound passages

of the Old Testament.

It is a chapter of revelation,

It is a chapter whereby Joseph,

is able to declare that he has seen God working,

that he has seen God working in all the events,

leading up to this reunion with his brothers,

that he has seen God working,

in his pain,

in his betrayal,

in his abandonment by his family,

and seemingly, by God.

It is in this chapter,
that Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.
But it is here too that God is revealed.

I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.
Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves
for selling me into Egypt.

God sent me.

God sent me ahead of you to save lives.

You sold me.

God sent me ahead.

This is one event.

But what happened would be told very differently
by Jacob, by the brothers, and now by Joseph.

I cannot tell you why the journey has to be difficult or painful.

I cannot tell you why

God didn't invite Joseph to Egypt,

with a gilded invitation,

escorted in a chariot pulled by Pharaoh's stallions.

Might have been a nicer way to enter into God's service.
Certainly better than being betrayed by your brothers,
thrown into a well,
and carried off into slavery.

I don't know why God didn't have Joseph arrive at Pharaoh's court,
ready to work on the famine problem right away.

Being framed by Potiphar's wife,
abandoned by Potiphar and jailed,
seems an unhelpful and unfair
path for one whom God has sent.

I don't know why God allows the journey to be difficult or painful.

If I had an answer to that,
then I would write a book,
and I could personally end thousands of years
of debate and discussion.

I don't know why.

And I confess, it can make it hard to trust God.

It can make it hard to believe Romans 8:28 which says

'We know that in all things,
God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.'

Trying quoting that to someone in pain sometime.

See what kind of reaction you get.

I don't know why the journey has to be painful and difficult.

I can only find my comfort,
and my ability to trust,
in another's story.

It is the story of the great and mighty God,
through whom all of creation came into being.

It is the story of that mighty God realizing
that his creation was in terrible trouble,
and in need of tremendous help.

So the mighty God entered into his creation through his Son,
but so as not to intimidate or frighten his creatures
he became just like one of them.

He was born a creature's birth,
to an unwed mother,
in a stable because the parents could not find a room.

This mighty God grew up unrecognized by most of his creation.

He taught about the kingdom of heaven.

He healed the sick, brought sight to the blind, fed the poor.

Crowds came to listen, for a while.

But the religious leaders,

the ones who should have known him best,

hated him.

They plotted his destruction.

When this mighty God appeared at the temple at Passover,

one of his followers betrayed him.

The others abandoned him.

And this mighty God was left

betrayed, abandoned and alone,

to call out to the Father in heaven,

to call out in fear, and worry, and pain.

This mighty God was the victim of a conspiracy.

Fake justice is not new.

He was whipped. Mocked. Crucified and died.

I don't know why the journey has to be painful and difficult.

But my ability to trust God comes from his own story.

And his own perspective on his journey.

Jesus said,

I have come that they might have life, life to the full.

You crucified me.

God sent me.

Don't let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God. Trust also in me.

In my Father's house are many rooms;

if it were not so, I would have told you.

I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you,

I will come back and take you to be with me,

that you also may be where I am.

You crucified me.

God sent me.

The journey is difficult and it can be painful.

I am unable to tell you why it is this way.

It is near impossible to see our story from God's perspective,
to understand how it is all working.

We live our lives more like Jacob waiting in Canaan,
wondering if God is trustworthy
wondering what's on the horizon,
than we do confident that we have been sent.

But we can trust.

We can trust God because,
while Jesus was crucified,
God sent him, sent him ahead to save.

We can trust because there is a reunion approaching.

Joseph realized God sent him.

Jesus, knew God sent him.

God has made you a witness to save too.

There is a reunion coming.

Jesus said, I am going to prepare a place for you.

We can trust because God

is always moving underneath all that happens.

So we trust God and keep moving forward,

to the day of reunion

the day of salvation.

Amen.