



Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 9, 2020

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude

Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

* Liturgist: Give praise to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

**All: Sing! Sing his praises; tell of all his wonderful names.
Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.**

Liturgist: Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

All: Let us remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, for we are his servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob...

Psalm 105: 1-6 adapted

Liturgist: through the covenant faithfulness of God in Christ.

All: Let us worship the Lord our God.

All Singing: 560 "We Praise You, O God"

Minister: To God's people gathered in hope: Grace to you, mercy and peace, from God our Creator and Christ our Redeemer, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Passing the Peace at a Distance

Reconciliation

Liturgist: Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him, they were terrified and cried out in fear,

All: It's a ghost!

Liturgist: But Jesus immediately said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Therefore, Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink he cried out,

All: Lord, save me!

Liturgist: Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying,

All: Truly you are the Son of God.

Matthew 14: 25-33 adapted

Silent confession and reflection

All Singing: 652 "I Lift My Eyes Up"

Liturgist: This is the message of faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

All: As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Liturgist: For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

All: For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Romans 10: 8-13

Proclamation

*** All Singing: 772 "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less"**

Scripture: Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. This is the account of Jacob's family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

“Very well,” he replied.

So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.” Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, “What are you looking for?”

He replied, “I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?”

“They have moved on from here,” the man answered. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’”

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Sermon: Part One

* **All Singing: 370 “My Soul Finds Rest”**

Dedication

Prayer

* **All Singing: 959 “Glory Be to the Father”**

Benediction

Praying with Elders – If you have a concern or joy that you’d like to talk or pray about with an Elder, one or two will be available in the shade near the sanctuary entrance following the service.

Worship Leaders

Pianist/Vocalist:	Erin Pacheco
Vocalist:	Lori Evenhouse
Percussion/Vocalist:	Clay Carlson
Alto Saxophone:	Danielle Murawski
Tenor Saxophone:	Aaron Murawski
Sound Engineer:	Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister:	Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Liturgist:	Nancy Kwasteniet
Prayer:	Jim Kwasteniet

10:15 AM Service

Liturgist:	Mark Rinkenberger
Prayer:	Sarah Rinkenberger

Hymns are from “Lift Up Your Hearts” (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
CCLI Copyright License 813746 | CCLI Streaming License 20253780 | OneLicense A-704612

Text: Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28
Title: Part One
Date: 08.09.20
Roger Allen Nelson

A popular artist began to slide into a depressive trough. She continued to be vibrant and vivacious but there was a creeping shadow, it took more work to keep up the façade. Not wanting to worry family or friends she pressed on, trying to shake the black dog that kept nipping at her heels. Eventually she was trapped in a cycle of lying about what she was feeling and believing the lies that kept pulling her down deeper. One night she woke her husband to confess that she'd taken a whole bunch of pills....

It was too late to pump her stomach.
She was deathly sick.
She clung to life.

In the aftermath she worked with a therapist and for the first time turned toward the abuse in her past. In that process she realized that when she was painting she would typically start by painting the canvas black and then adding color.

The color pushed back the black.
The color stood in stark contrast to the black.
The color jumped out,
the color drew your eye,
you might not even notice the black,
but it was always there in the background.

We often read the story of Joseph and his fancy coat as a splash of color against the darkness of his mean-scheming-brothers. It's a memorable story that's fit for stage and screen and has a place in every children's Bible picture book. I can still remember the drawings in the books that my parents made me read. The colorful coat drew my eye, the machinations of the brothers faded into the background, and it soon it became some sort of fable about the providence of God working out the promises of God.

And maybe that's what we've got here.
The color stands out.
The color pushes back the black.
Seems too simplistic a reading....
Would that it were that simple....

Dear friends, what are we to make of this familiar story? What does this ancient story say to us, to our time, and to our place in the unfolding story of God redeeming and reclaiming creation?

I think it's helpful to start with the long history of family dysfunction.

This is a third generation of conflict, conniving, and general human cussedness. Sarah favored Isaac and sent Ishmael packing. Abraham bound Isaac to be sacrificed. Rebekah coddled Jacob while Isaac liked fresh game from Esau's hand. Laban deceived Jacob who

deceived Esau. And in our text Jacob makes a fuss over Joseph, the son of his beloved Rachel.

At every turn the relationships are problematic. There's strife between twin brothers, between mothers, between an uncle and a nephew, and between God and his wrestling partner. Family system therapists would have a heyday with this dysfunctional tree. And our text picks up the story at its logical conclusion: a favored son is despised unto death by his brothers.

Frederick Buechner writes that the brothers would be acquitted in any court of the land, because, his words:

Not only did Joseph have offensive dreams in which he was Mr. Big and they were all groveling at his feet, but he recounted them in sickening detail at the breakfast table the next morning. He was also his father's pet, and they seethed at the sight of the many-colored coat he flaunted while they were running around in T-shirts and dirty jeans.

So, maybe a beginning point is to recognize that the founding fathers and mothers of faith were not pillars of piety, models for parenting, or examples of ethical consistency in the face of familiar family struggles. They were as flawed and fallen as you and me. Their families were as broken as yours and mine. And the repercussions of their dysfunction reverberated for generations. The sins of the fathers and mothers were visited on their children and their children's children.

And that is to say that none of us start with a clean slate.

We all carry the gifts and curses of those who came before us.

We all carry generational baggage.

We all have issues.

And yet...

And yet, while that might be vaguely encouraging in some way, very few of us have schemed to kill our siblings. While we might have little brothers – who were tattletales and braggarts that got on our last nerve – most of us don't plot their murder. So, surely these guys were worse!

Well, maybe not so much....

Our text has it that, "they plotted to kill him." In other translations it's, "conspired." The Hebrew phrase is actually an obscure verb construction that is both reflexive and causative. It could literally be translated as, "they caused deceit to themselves to kill him."

That little grammatical twist highlights that they turned themselves into knots with all the competing commitments of brotherhood, fidelity to their father's wishes, and envy for Joseph. The situation was complex and they don't make a rash decision, but they convince themselves that this was an acceptable course of action.

The human capacity for self-deception is astonishing.
The artist believed the lies she told herself.
Darkness is the backdrop for all the color.

The brother's decision to spare Joseph's life, put him in a cistern, and eventually sell him into slavery is a fascinating exchange. There is a kind of moral tug of war – they can't face the reality of their deepest desire so they mute and muddle it through other means.

But, in many respects the outcome is the same: They go home to tell Jacob that his son is dead – and for all intents and purposes that's their reality. They sell their brother into slavery for 20 shekels and dip the technicolor coat into goat's blood to deceive their father.

And with that, their self-deception has reached its zenith. Ten brothers saw fit to trade their brother's life and their father's blessing for a profit. They put themselves and their privilege over their brother's life.

Given our current national conversation about race and slavery and mass incarceration and the kind of cultural self-deception that it takes to perpetuate that power maybe it's worth sitting with this for a moment.

One Hebrew scholar frames it this way:

Reading the text is an invitation to sit in the perspective of the ten brothers. How do we "cause deceit to ourselves" in ways that protect our own privilege at the expense of those in marginalized spaces? This is the reading that is so important with the reality of the violent dangers that African American communities face in daily life. Perhaps this passage can compel Christians to examine their present and historic complicities in the racialized terror that plagues Black bodies. Yes, we know that God is sovereign. But this passage ends with Joseph sold and being sent to a lifetime of servanthood. We cannot let the sovereignty of God rescue us from our moral responsibility. The sovereignty of God does not invalidate the present pain of oppression. The passage ends with Joseph in suffering with no justice in sight. Many in our faith communities will relate.

Gulp! That reading hangs a lot on a translation of the word for "plotted" and on our collective capacity for self-deception to keep power.

You might take exception. You might think it reads too much into this text and comes dangerously close to being too political. Self-deception around private matters is understandable but this sort of corporate reading takes it too far. And you know better about the real threats regarding race and history and responsibility....

Could be. But, we're given a story where brothers sell a brother into slavery and at its core there's a conspiracy of complicity where power is exercised to protect privilege.

Dear friends, in "Reformed Preaching 101" you're taught to look for what God is doing in the text. While there may be life lessons in the behavior of the biblical characters what matters is the behavior of God. The Good News is in the activity of God.

So, what are we to do with a story in which God isn't mentioned?
What do we do when there's no word from, or action by, God?
Our tendency is to read something into the text, hatch a lesson that fits our sensibilities, and recreate God in our own image. Seems ill advised....

Instead, I'd suggest that we simply sit with the text, ruminate on the humanity of it all, live with the black, look for the splashes of color, and wait for the voice and movement of God....

Maybe that's the rest of the story?

Maybe as we read further we'll see God's will being worked out?

Maybe that shows up in Part Two?

Maybe a glimpse here of collective human deception and darkness is enough....

What's clear is that the flaws of families and machinations of men are the arena in which God's works out his will.

So, we cling to the promise that God's redemptive arc is still weaving its way through families that are rife with strife and full of dysfunction. And we trust that the light will overcome the darkness and that God's will ultimately is realized in human history.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.
Amen.