

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I think our Gospel reading that we've just heard and the Old Testament reading, that great story of Joseph, form a great pair. They go well together. So I want to see how they speak to each other.

In the Gospel reading, we have a very significant part of Jesus' teaching right after the beatitudes. It's the heart of Jesus' teaching. And he's telling his hearers here how to live. And he sets out some very high standards for them to follow. "Do good to those who hate you, do unto others as you would have them do to you. Forgive and you will be forgiven." The bar is being set high.

Then in the Old Testament reading, we get to the climax of the Joseph story, which is told in great detail at the end of the book of Genesis. And here's the most important, the turning point in this story. And it strikes me that what we have in the Joseph story and what we see in that reading is an account of what a life looks like when it's lived according to the principles that Jesus sets out.

So I want to look at Joseph's story as an example of the kind of life Jesus is talking about in that Gospel passage. To see the Joseph story, if Jesus' teaching is the theory, Joseph's story is the practice, having it worked out. So I want to talk about Joseph. But before I do that, I need to just give a bit of background so that we can understand why this bit that we had read is so important in the story.

You might be familiar with the story of Joseph, especially if you're a fan of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Joseph was the youngest of twelve brothers. He was the favorite of this father, which is why he got that trendy coat which his brothers didn't have and one of the reasons why they were jealous of him.

But it wasn't the only reason they were jealous of him and really didn't like him. That also had something to do with his ability to understand and interpret dreams. This came out later in the story, he'd have dreams and then he would offer an interpretation.

Often when it wasn't really in his best interest to offer an interpretation. So when he had a dream of his eleven brothers bowing down and worshipping him, he probably could have kept that to himself. But he didn't. And he ended up being attacked by his brothers who planned to kill him. But they were persuaded not to kill him, they shoved him down a well and in the end they sold him to some merchants on their way to Egypt.

Which is how Joseph ends up Egypt where he prospered. And this ability he had to interpret dreams brings him to the attention of the Pharaoh and he ends up in very high position, a sort of Prime Minister of Egypt while his brothers and the rest of the family are left in the old country and a famine comes. His brothers don't have any food and the people of Egypt, thanks to Joseph's good stewardship, have plenty of food. So that's what's going on in this story.

Then I should say that there's a strange bit just before this where Joseph kind of plays with his brothers. He knows who they are, but they don't know who he is. And he kind of hides his identity. But in this passage, we get the great reveal. "I am Joseph," he says, making himself known to his brothers. Which makes them both amazed and dismayed to find his brothers in this instance. And of course, that dream he had of them bowing down to him comes to fruition.

But the really interesting thing is what happens next in our text. Joseph's retelling of the story from another perspective, from God's perspective. So he calls his brothers close and he says quietly to them, "I am your brother, Joseph, who you sold into Egypt. But don't be distressed or angry because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." Notice how "you sold" gets changed to "God sent" in Joseph's telling of the story.

In Joseph's telling of events, the brothers selling him off to Egypt can be seen as God sending him there. "It was God, not you, who sent me here," he says. Two tellings of one set of events. Two competing narratives, we might say in modern parlance. Joseph saw the providential hand of God guiding him, bringing good out of evil. The same experience the

hymn writer spoke of when he talks of God moving in mysterious ways. This is certainly mysterious, how getting him to Egypt, he needed to be thrown into a well in the first instance for his people to be saved.

But God had a reason to send Joseph to Egypt, it was to enable them to survive the famine which came to their land. Which is why Joseph can say to his brothers, "It was not you who sent me here, but God." Joseph's story could be told as a story of fraternal jealousy, where the lost son made good, but Joseph doesn't tell it like that. He tells it as a story of God working to save his people.

Joseph, of course, could have reacted very differently. This was a magnificent opportunity for him to exact revenge on his brothers. He had all the power, he could finally have got back on those who had wronged him. But he didn't. He did as Jesus taught, he loved his enemies and did good to those who hated him. Joseph saw the bigger picture. He trusted God and he knew that God was in control of his life. He knew the truth of what Paul says in the book of Romans, "That in all things, God works for the good of those who love him."

I think all the goodness that flowed out of Joseph came from that fundamental trust in God that he was blessed with. In the Psalm, the choir sang something we were encouraged to do, to put our trust in the Lord and do good. That's what Joseph does, trusts in the Lord and does good. That's what he did, that's what enabled him to see things from the big divine perspective. He saw the big picture, which meant he didn't get caught up in pettiness of life.

What's very striking about this story, or one of the striking things, is Joseph's ability to forgive his brothers. Jesus taught, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." And Joseph shows us what that looks like in practice. He shows us that forgiveness is always a choice and it's always a good choice. As the saying goes, "Forgiveness is a funny thing, it warms the heart and cools the sting."

Joseph could have had his brothers arrested, but by choosing to forgive, not only was he able to be reunited with his father, but the whole people were

able to survive as he shared with them the abundance of the Egyptian harvest.

Dale Carnegie once visited Yellowstone Park and saw a huge grizzly bear in a clearing. And the bear was tucking into some food that had been left behind by some campers. And for several minutes, the bear feasted alone. No other creature dared draw near because they knew they'd be chased off by the grizzly bear.

Then after a few moments, a skunk walked through the meadow towards the food and took his place towards the grizzly. And they tucked into together, next door to each other. The bear didn't object to the skunk's presence and Carnegie knew why, it would cost the bear too much to get even. And what's true for grizzly bears is also true for us, it costs too much to get even. We're always better off forgiving.

And in the context of this Eucharist, we're reminded of another reason to forgive. We forgive because we are a forgiven people. What we celebrate in this Eucharist is Jesus' great act of self-sacrifice. We remember again that on the cross he won our salvation, brought us into right relationship with God and did what had to be done for us to be forgiven of our sins. In this Eucharist, we celebrate our forgiveness. How could we not leave this place ready to forgive? We're a forgiven people, called to be a forgiving people.

So what we've seen this morning is how Joseph leads a life in accordance with the principles of Jesus' teaching. He did good to those who hated him and he practiced the art of forgiveness. May we be given the grace to live the same way.