

Sermon 24.11.24

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Genesis 50: 15-21

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

SERMON : [Slide show](#)

On the morning of March 16, 1968¹, when a company of American soldiers showed up in his village of My Lai (ME - LIE) Nguyen Hong Mang (NEW-ENG Hong Mang) **IMAGE** met the soldiers with a smile, shouting, "Welcome, Americans!" He was 14 years old.

Minutes later most of his family was dead. He survived because the Americans had run out of bullets. US soldiers killed more than 500 women, children and older men that day.

The reporter of this story had gone to My Lai (ME - LIE) **IMAGE** in search of lessons in resilience and how to work with anger. While there, he was often *struck by efforts to treat hatred like a virus, to suppress its power, to avoid passing it on or letting it grow.*

Vietnam often tops polls rankings of the world's most optimistic countries — eager to seek prosperity with past enemies.

He found the surviving villagers spoke of those who did not kill, or who tried to stop the slaughter.

But Americans tend to oversimplify Vietnamese good will. In the streets around the My Lai (ME - LIE) massacre museum, forgetting was impossible, forgiveness earned.

¹ [No Use for Hatred](#)

Truong Thi (Tie) Son, **IMAGE** whose husband's family was killed, admitted: "I carried a lot of hatred for a long time," she said.

But now - "If we feel hatred now, what's the use? There's no use for hatred."

IMAGE "I want everyone to remember the pain, the brutality, the losses," she said. "But I also want this village to be known for transformation, for moving from hardship to prosperity."

There is an ancient Buddhist parable about two arrows. **IMAGE**

The first arrow represents the inevitable pain we encounter in life—loss, disappointment, heartbreak, or physical pain. These moments are part of being human - they strike us all. The second arrow, however, is different. It's the suffering we add to that pain—the anger, hatred, self-blame, fear, or resentment that grows when we resist what has happened. The first arrow is unavoidable, but the second arrow? That one is within our control.

Those like Truong Thi (Tie) Son, Nguyen Hong Mang (NEW-ENG Hong Mang) and others in the villages of My Lai (ME - LIE) bear suffering that is unimaginable to me. and yet they seem to have learned to not let that second arrow of hatred and resentment control their lives. Their seeing their *hatred like a virus, and their ability to suppress its power, to avoid passing it on or letting it grow is the way of transformation.*

Our scripture today is another illustration of what it is to choose how to live with the first and the second arrows of our lives. The ways of Joseph and the ways of his brothers exemplify these differences.

This is our last look at the book of Genesis -

As we've journeyed through this book, we've discovered that -

1. Genesis is a story of continued struggle - that's the meaning of the name Israel "one who wrestles with God" - the man and the people.

2. Genesis is a story of the Israelites faith in God with whom they have an ongoing relationship. A faith that God will see them through. A trust in the blessings and promises of this God who journeys with them.
3. The story of Genesis, of God's continued presence, doesn't end here. Genesis is a story of beginnings. Over and over God and the people find their way, together.

Background - Few chapters back, as the famine worsened, Jo made all the people of Egypt slaves (everyone but the priests). After the common folk had eaten through their stores, they sold everything - their possessions and livestock - to buy back the grain they grew, they were forced to sell their land and even their bodies, so they had enough to survive. Joseph is ruthless in what he demands from the Egyptian people, yet we're told the family of Jacob "gained possession of the region of Goshen" where they were provided for, were fruitful and multiplied.

Makes me wonder what that was like for the Egyptians. The book of Exodus begins with a genealogy of the ever growing family of Israel, and these words: "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and powerful than we...let us deal shrewdly, wisely, with them' and he oppressed them with forced labor.

How did the actions of Joseph impact later generations?

The second arrow - that of resentment and mistrust can follow us for generations. Suffering is a part of life, that's the first arrow.

The second arrow is what we choose to drag along, suffering that doesn't need to be a part of us.

In our scripture today -

The brothers, who have been living in Egypt with Joseph for **17 years now**, are still afraid. Following their father's death, they wonder if Joseph will seek revenge. Does he still bear a grudge against them? Wow, what arrows of fear and resentment still are lodged in these men?

What do they do? Deception is an ongoing theme throughout this book.

"YOUR FATHER gave this instruction... forgive the crime of your brothers"

There's lots of weeping. The brothers fall down and bow (this is the second time they bow down to Jo - the first they didn't know it was him, when they came seeking grain, but this time they knowingly bow down to their younger brother).

Jo's response is not one of outright forgiveness, instead, he offers reassurance.

Do not be afraid (do you hear the echo of Jesus -how many times does he say that to his disciples?)

AM I IN THE PLACE OF GOD? **IMAGE**

“Even though you intended to do me harm, God intended it for your good - for the preservation of our people.”

AM I IN THE PLACE OF GOD?

These exact same words are said back in Gen. 30: 2 - as Jacob replies to Rachel, who, desperate to have a child, cried out ‘Give me children or I shall die!’. Jacob’s response back then: Am I in the place of God?

How often was that line used in their household?

Am I in the place of God? I hear that as

Right sizing. Keeping the second arrow at bay. Jos seems to say: Suffering is part of my life, yes, but it doesn’t control me. I refuse to let bitterness and resentment lead me. God’s ways are what guide me.

RIGHT SIZING - Joseph recognizes that God is the creator of the universe and the one who leads him and his family throughout time. He knows where he belongs in the story of God. He’s not the center, God is.

The brothers, they have lived a lifetime of the arrows of doubt and fear steering their lives. Many years back they committed a great harm, they created suffering and have carried it with them. And, from the sounds of it, the continued suffering of their own making was still there. So much so that they needed to create a dubious story one more time - *father said* you should forgive us...

Joseph doesn’t take the bait. Doesn’t question the legitimacy of their claim.

Am I in the place of God?

That line reminds us all that even when in places of power, none of us are in the place of God.

Joseph has a deep trust that God is in control, not him. That knowledge of God’s guiding presence allows him to let go of his suffering.

Joseph never forgets God’s place as the central figure in his life story.

And we come to the end of this book of Genesis - full of stories of profound humanness - trickery, lies, anger that causes brothers to kill, or want to kill each other, AND YET - God uses this clan. Shapes them, blesses them with promises of land and family.

We’ve met a God in these stories that at times is incomprehensible - at times downright scary - and we’ve encountered a God that over and over and over says ‘you are my people. I am with you. Follow me and I will show you the way. Choose life - that is the way of God. Choosing life; choosing to keep God as the center.’

This God of Genesis is the One Jesus knew so intimately. These stories of the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Jacob, Rachel and Rebecca - they shaped him, maybe confounded and troubled him, nourished him.

Like the name Israel reminds us - we are a people called to struggle with these sacred stories. To stay in relationship, seeking the one who is always seeking us.