

Sermon Draft for April 9, 2025, Lenten Midweek 6
The Good News of a Savior Who Brings Good from Evil
Text: Genesis 50:15–21

The injustice in this world can be painful to see or even to think about. So often, the faithful suffer while evil seems to prosper. Perhaps most troubling of all are situations in which we see someone suffering not because of anything wrong he or she has done but because of the wrong someone else has done to that person. A poignant example is found in the last chapters of Genesis, where we see the sufferings of Joseph.

During each of these midweek Lenten sermons, we've found that this very first book of the Bible, of the Old Testament, Genesis, is rich with Gospel just as we'd expect to find in the New Testament. But the situation Joseph faced was extremely desperate. Will we find any good news this one last time?

Of Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph was especially dear to him because he'd been born to him in his old age.

Jacob favored Joseph as seen, for example, when he singled him out for the gift of a special robe of many colors. Jacob's other children noticed the favoritism, of course, and became consumed with jealousy.

One day, when Joseph was seventeen, Jacob sent him to check on his brothers, who were out tending the flocks. When the brothers saw Joseph coming, they saw this as their opportunity to be rid of him. They took his robe and threw him into a pit.

The plan had been to leave him there where he surely would have died. But that changed when a caravan of Ishmaelites came along and Joseph's brothers decided to sell him to them instead. They sold their own brother for twenty pieces of silver and went back home to their father with the story that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Things like that are not supposed to happen. Brothers should not hate brothers. And nobody should treat another person like mere property to be sold. It's the kind of injustice that tears at your heart.

But if the injustice done to Joseph tears at your heart, the injustice done to Jesus should crush it.

In some ways, Jesus' experience was similar to that of Joseph. Joseph had been betrayed by his brothers and Jesus was betrayed by a friend and disciple, Judas Iscariot, whom Jesus had loved like a brother. Joseph was sold into slavery for twenty pieces of silver and Judas sold out Jesus for thirty pieces.

In other ways, though, what happened to Jesus far surpassed what happened to Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery but Jesus was handed over to those who sought his life. And while nothing could justify what Joseph's brothers did, we do see examples in which Joseph may have shown some insensitivity to his brothers perhaps not intentionally, but still lacking awareness of how his favored status made them feel. Jesus, on the other hand, had done absolutely nothing wrong.

He had never been unkind or insensitive to Judas. He had been literally the perfect friend and remained so to the end, as in Gethsemane Jesus even addressed as “friend” the one who had just betrayed him with a kiss.

In the experiences of Joseph and Jesus, we see two stark examples of the kind of injustice that does not belong in God’s good creation. And we see that God himself—in the person of Jesus Christ—is the victim of the greatest injustice.

As bad as it was when Joseph and Jesus were betrayed, though, matters soon got worse.

For a while, things were looking up for Joseph. He was sold as a slave to an Egyptian official, Potiphar, and his good work was rewarded as he was placed in charge of Potiphar’s estate.

But then it all came crashing down. Potiphar’s wife leveled false charges against Joseph, and he found himself in prison. It must have felt like being thrown in a pit all over again—and it wasn’t at all clear that he would be pulled out this time.

Jesus found himself in even darker circumstances. After Judas led Jesus' enemies to him, he stood trial through that night and was handed over to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate early the next morning. Much like Joseph, Jesus was falsely accused and unjustly condemned. By nine o'clock that morning—having already been scourged and beaten—Jesus hung nailed to a cross as those around him mocked.

Yet even that was not the deepest of Jesus' woes. For on the cross, Jesus' deepest pain came not from the nails that pierced his hands and feet but from the judgment of God the Father that pierced his heart and soul. Even when Joseph was in prison, we are assured that

“the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love”

(Genesis 39:21). But on the cross, Jesus had no such comfort—an agony he expressed as he cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46).

And why had Jesus' God and Father forsaken him? Because he stood in our place, bearing the just judgment for all our sin. Jesus was completely innocent, and the human decisions that sent him to the cross were the ultimate injustice. Yet out of his great love for us, Christ willingly gave himself up for us to be the propitiation for our sins. The Son of God died for the ungodly; the righteous suffered and died for the unrighteous.

That is what sets apart the suffering of Jesus as not only the most unjust but also the most personal for us to look at. For in this case, we're not just standing by, grieving to see an innocent person suffer. In this case, we are the ones who caused the suffering—because it is our sins for which Jesus suffered and died.

Yet as uncomfortable as it might be to see such suffering, we must not turn our eyes away—because if we do, we will fail to see what God has done.

As Joseph sat in prison, he seemed to have hit rock bottom. But as he came to see, we have a God who lifts up those who are bowed down and who sets prisoners free. The Lord gave Joseph the opportunity and ability to interpret a dream for the pharaoh. And as a result, Joseph was rewarded not only with his freedom but also with a position at the top of the Egyptian government. By God's grace, a great reversal had been brought about.

But as great as that reversal was, it does not hold a candle to the reversal we see in Jesus Christ! He did suffer under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. But on the third day, he rose again from the dead—and he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. For us, God had forsaken his Son on the cross, but he would not abandon him to the grave. In the words of Psalm 118, ***“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes”*** (Psalm 118:22–23).

And there are even more marvelous things for our eyes to behold—for Joseph’s elevation and Jesus’ resurrection were good news not only for them but also for many!

A time came when Jacob’s family was suffering due to a widespread famine. Thanks to the wise leadership of a certain government leader, Egypt had prepared for the famine and was able not only to feed its own people but also to provide assistance to others.

So, Jacob sent his ten oldest sons to Egypt to buy food. That government leader, Joseph, recognized his brothers when they came for help, and he arranged for the whole family to be brought to Egypt and taken care of. The brother who had been sold into slavery—and had then been raised up to a position of power—used that power not to get revenge on those who had wronged him but to show them mercy and help them.

And so, Christ does for us. Risen from the dead and reigning at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is using his exalted position not to seek vengeance on us who caused his death but to intercede for us (Rom 8:34) and work for our good. Sometimes we are the ones who suffer injustice in this fallen world. But Christ comes to us in the waters of Holy Baptism and brings about a great reversal for us, raising us from the death of sin to new and everlasting life in him, a life in which all will be made right. And as Joseph provided food for his family, our Lord Jesus Christ feeds us with himself as the bread of life; whoever eats of this bread will live not only through a famine but even forever.

When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers, who had sold him into slavery, worried that their brother would then, with their father gone, at last exact his revenge. But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and

your little ones” (vv 19–21).

So also we do not need to fear that one day our Lord will want to judge us for our sins that nailed him to the cross. What man did to Christ on Good Friday was evil. Our sins for which he died are evil. But God has shown us the good news that, In Christ, we have a Savior who brings good out of evil. God showed us that in the events of Joseph’s life and he fully shows us that in the suffering, death, resurrection, and gracious reign of Christ Jesus our Savior.

From the darkness of Calvary, he brings the light of our salvation. From his death, he brings us life.

And because that is what our gracious God is like, we know that neither our sins nor the injustices of this world, neither life nor death nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, yes, there is good news in this last story of the book of Genesis. From the very beginning all the way back to the first sin God has been dealing with that sin, always through the great event of all history that we'll hear again this coming week: the death and resurrection of Jesus. That Good News, that Gospel, is really the message of every page of Holy Scripture. In all things, God is working for our good—and with him, there is always more good to come.

May his name be praised forever. Amen.