

“From a pig’s ear to a silk purse”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday February 24, 2019

Genesis 45:1-15

In our scripture this morning we have this amazing story of Joseph forgiving his brothers.

We have this warm family scene where Joseph is kissing and weeping over all of his brothers.

It is stunning to me.

And Joseph says these amazing words of faith; “God sent me ahead of you.”

“God sent me here.”

How did Joseph arrive at the place where he could love and forgive his brothers, where he could say that God had sent him to that place and it was so that Joseph could save many, many people, including his family?

Joseph’s brothers had wanted to kill him and they sold him into slavery.

Joseph became a very trusted slave in the house of Potiphar, but he was unjustly accused by Potiphar’s wife, and he was sent off to prison.

Joseph spent years in prison, forgotten, forsaken, and it was a long time before he was freed.

Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food, and Joseph was finally in a position of power over his brothers.

And in our scripture this morning – Joseph forgives his brothers and wants to be restored to his family – and believes that God intended everything he had gone through to work for good.

Amazing. How did Joseph become that kind of man?

Joseph didn't begin life as this humble, forgiving man of great faith.

Some of you know the story of Joseph – he began life as Joseph with the Coat of many Colours.

He was always a dreamer – he was the youngest and his father's favourite, and it seems he didn't have a lot of wise judgment.

Joseph's brothers were jealous of him.

Joseph had a way of throwing salt into his brother's wounds- or gas on the fire.

He repeatedly told them of his dreams that all of them would bow before him.

The brothers hated him and decided to kill him, but later thought it just as expedient to sell him into slavery to a foreign slave dealer.

So how does a spoiled youngest child, who was hated so much that his brother's wanted to kill him, become a man of faith and forgiveness?

How does the sough's ear become a silk purse?

Jesus said that we are to be perfect as God is perfect. The apostle Paul asserts that God "chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love." (Eph 1:4)

Paul's letters to the churches – to all the people who followed Jesus, to all of us, these words in the Bible are instructions to teach and encourage us to be built up "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the full stature of Christ (Eph 4:13).

You and I are called to mature to the "measure of the full stature of Christ."

"and to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Eph 4:15)

And this maturing or growing up in every way into Christ happens in the stuff of our every day lives.

Joseph was formed into a man of faith and forgiveness through all the events of his life.

In God's hands, Joseph became a man of great character.

C.S. Lewis talks about one of his own spiritual practises.

At the end of the day when he says his prayers he tries to reckon up the sins of the day.

Most often he has sulked or snapped or sneered or snubbed or stormed.

And the excuse that immediately springs to his mind is that the provocation was so sudden and unexpected; he was caught off his guard.

But he reflects that when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of a man he is.

Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth.

If there are rats in the cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats.

In the same way the suddenness does not make him an ill-tempered man; it only shows what an ill-tempered man he is.

The trials Joseph went through, with God's help, given into God's hands, cleared the rats out of the cellar of Joseph's life, so he became a man of character and great faith.

When I think about Joseph, humbled, sold into slavery, unjustly accused, spending years in a prison, there are a few things I notice.

The first is that Joseph did the right things.

He was faithful to Potiphar.

He was a faithful servant – he was righteous and wouldn't betray Potiphar or God.

And God blessed Joseph.

Though Joseph's situation didn't change – God blessed him and blessed the household.

God was with Joseph.

As I think about Joseph's life I expect there were times of great loneliness.

Joseph experienced great loss – he lost his family, his culture, his friends, his whole community.

Even though he did what was right he was thrown into jail.

Difficult, unfair, wrong things happened in Joseph's life.

But he continued to do the right things, to trust in God's sovereignty over his life.

God, it seems has the long view.

Because he was faithful, because he allowed God to try him as silver is tried.

Because he was faithful in the day to day things, even when he was wronged – God was with him, and God could use Joseph in a great and unexpected way, and Joseph continues to be an example to us.

I don't know what trials you are going through.
I don't know how you have been unfairly treated.
But I see this example of Joseph, and what God was able to do in and through this man, and who he became in God's hands and it gives me hope.

And I want to encourage all of us to continue doing the right things.
Continue to be the person of faith who knows they are in God's hands even when it is not working out.

God has a long view, and God is making all of us new creations in Christ.
This process of all of us going from a sough's ear to a silk purse is not easy.
But we are becoming like our Lord Jesus, in the stuff of today – **whether** it is in the daily grind, or in the trials, in the victories or in the wrongs, in God's hands this can work for his glory, for making us sons and daughters, and for a part of God's good plan.

Thanks be to God!