

The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
Feb. 20, 2022

The Lessons: Genesis 45:3-15
Psalm 103:1-13
1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42
Luke 6:27-38

The Hymns: # 832 *Jesus Shall Reign*
824 *May God Bestow on Us His Grace*
411 *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*

The Collect: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:
Dr. Sam Thompson - Seminary Sunday

Genesis 45: 3-15

O Lord, open our hearts and mind to Your word. So that we may hear You clearly and love You dearly and follow You passionately! Amen

Ordinarily, we don't often get a chance to think that the world in which we live is much larger than our own house, our job, and the immediate family with which we daily interact. This is not wrong as our daily chores consume so much of our time and demand our unfettered attention and energy. Our plates are full, and our cups of pain and duress preoccupy almost all our time leaving no room for us to pause for some reflection. But have you ever, when you get time to catch a breath, wondered: Is there a larger purpose to my life? Is there a meaning to my life? Am I the sum of my own failure or poor choices I made at different points of my life? Or where I am today, is the result of someone else's violence, hurt, abuse, neglect, or mistakes? Where is God and what is He doing in midst of all the failures and events (good or bad) which shaped my life? Is He a distant onlooker? Or is He engaged actively in my life?

In today's Old Testament lesson, we meet Joseph, whose life was full of twists and turns. At every point in his life, he had every reason to be remorseful towards God and towards people who were close to him.

Joseph had been his father's favorite son, next to his younger brother Benjamin. Joseph had been a dreamer and a gifted interpreter of dreams (Gen 37). Two of his dreams cost him the love and favor of his siblings. Outraged with envy and jealousy, Joseph's brothers sold this underaged young lad to an Ishmaelite caravan for barely 220 grams of silver (37:28). The same siblings betrayed Joseph to their aged father Jacob saying that some wild animals devoured him, and that Joseph sadly was no more. They brought to Jacob a blood-stained robe of many colors that Jacob could easily identify as Joseph's (Gen 28-30). Joseph's dreams cost him the company and security of his father and his blood

brothers; later Joseph's interpretation of an Egyptian monarch's dream raised him to become the second in command in all of Egypt.

But Joseph's life in Egypt did not start off well. Unfortunately, the wife of one of Pharaoh's officers falsely charged virtuous Joseph for sexual misconduct. And Joseph was put in the Pharaoh's prison where the king's prisoners were confined. While in prison, God gave Joseph the opportunity to interpret the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. Joseph's interpretation was proven correct. So, the king's cup bearer returned to his job and the baker was hanged (40). But the cupbearer neglected and forgot Joseph.

When the Pharaoh needed someone to interpret his dreams, the cupbearer remembered and introduced Joseph to the king. Joseph rightly interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams. Realizing that prisoner Joseph was blessed with discernment and wisdom from above, Pharaoh had no second thoughts to appoint the thirty-year-old Jewish Joseph second only to him in the entire Egyptian empire. Severe famine hit the entire region. The rest of Jacob's family - now living in Israel - traveled to Egypt to buy food. Little did they know that their blood brother Joseph whom they betrayed was now ruler of Egypt. In fact, the Pharaoh had been saying to all Egyptians, "Go to Joseph, what he says to you, do."

In today's scripture lesson we read the amazing hind-sight faith confession of Joseph about God who according to him actively shaped a so called unfortunate event in his life towards the greater good of everyone. A careful study on Joseph's life would tell us that this conviction kept him going in midst of all so-called tragedies he faced in his life. So, we read that when Joseph saw his siblings walk to his office begging for food, he figured out who they were and wept aloud. Joseph boldly confessed to them that he is their blood brother. To his terrified and distressed brothers, he assured them that "I am your blood brother whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves for GOD sent me here before you to preserve life," Joseph told them publicly (Gen 45:4-15). Later he said "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20). What an amazing "faith confession" about God. To Joseph, God is not a distant onlooker but someone who is actively present and intervened in his life turning unfortunate events for the greater good. This faith conviction not only provided a perspective for him to trust God in midst of all trials and suffering, but rise above the ordinary and to forgive and be merciful to his enemies.

But who is this God who protected Joseph's life? Who is this God who preserved the entire world during a devastating famine and saved a remnant of Israel in a foreign Egypt? The word used for God in Joseph's faith confession is "Elohim." This word is used to address about God more than 2500 times in the bible. Elohim means the powerful one, the almighty one, the prominent one; whose power is understood to be without any match, without any limit. A God who is dreadful, who can do anything He wants and anything He pleases. Because of His power, His presence, the earth shakes, the mountain fumes and the mighty kings of the earth tremble. Thus, in Elohim we meet a powerful, almighty, and awesome God, who can do anything He wants and pleases.

Having defined Elohim as someone who is dreadful and powerful, there is every reason for us to tremble with fear at his presence and to keep our distance with him. But there something in Elohim's power which makes him equally fascinating, desirable, and winsome. This becomes clear when we study the initial instance where God revealed himself to us as Elohim. The first instance where God revealed himself to us as Elohim is in the creation narrative found in the first two chapters of the

bible. Traditionally theologians have used two Latin words to talk about God's creative activity in the bible. They are *creatio exnihilio* and *creatio continuuo*. What does these words mean? The word *creatio exnihilio* means creation out of nothing. In Genesis 1:1 we read "In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the Earth". From where? He created everything from nowhere or out of nothing! Elohim is all powerful God, who has brought everything into existence out of nothing.

Creatio Continua employs an idea of Elohim who continues to order and shape the creation for His purpose. Genesis 1:2, we read that the earth was empty and formless, and darkness was on the surface of the earth. The word empty and formless could mean- chaos, discord, disorder, darkness and so on. But we find creator Elohim employing his creative power to bring something creative, meaningful and purposeful. He said let there be light, day, land, birds, animals, sea, and it all came into existence and finally God formed the man out of the dust. God's creative power is *creatio continuo* or an ongoing creative creational power which is marked with creativity and constructiveness. Elohim employs His almighty power to bring form from formlessness, order from disorder, light from darkness, hope in midst of hopelessness. Thus, Elohim's power is creative, active, constructive. He brings beauty, purpose, hope and meaning in one's life. This same creative and purposeful power of Elohim operated in Joseph's life and turned evil, despair, brokenness into something good and for greater purpose. Elohim was in charge; Joseph could confess to his brother that "Now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves. for GOD sent me here before you to preserve life," (Gen 45:4-15). "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20).

Joseph's life in the Old Testament was a foreshadow of a greater story that unfolded in the New Testament. Here, the Elohim, the Almighty and all-powerful God sent his only Son into this world. This almighty incarnate Son of God in flesh, who created everything out of nothing taught "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Highest; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your father is merciful."

Through Joseph, Elohim preserved the 12 tribes of Israel and provided food for the world. But through Jesus Christ, Elohim's power destroyed every evil which came through human sin and through Him, Elohim showed mercy, forgiveness of sins to the whole world. Paul said "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).

Peter on the day of Pentecost preached as you yourselves know— this Jesus, whom you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death. So that He may be your salvation. Paul later said the Gospel of this Jesus Christ is God's power unto salvation. The Greek word used here is "*Dunamis*" from where the English word Dynamite comes from. We know that a small amount of dynamite is enough to destroy a big building. However, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a *Dunamis* is not something that just destroys. It indeed destroyed the evil and power of Satan, but this Gospel of Christ also offers forgiveness of sins and salvation. His gospel transforms our lives in a way that we re-created through waters of baptism and provides a hope and purpose in our lives even if our lives are plagued with pain, hopeless and suffering caused by our sins or sins or hurt from others.

So we can be sure what some people may be intending for harm – even if unintentionally- God will turn it around for our good.

Growing up I heard an amazing story of a young man called Jim Elliot and his friend who longed to share the Gospel with a violent and unreached people group in Ecuador called Auca Indians. On February 2, 1952, Jim Elliot and his friends waved goodbye to their parents and boarded a ship to Ecuador, South America. After four years of intense prayers and preparation on January 2, 1956, 29-year-old Jim Elliot and four of his fellow missionaries finally decided to camp in the territory of a dangerous and uncontacted Indian tribe known then as the Aucas to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Aucas had killed all outsiders ever caught in their area. Even though it was dangerous, Jim Elliot had no doubt God wanted him to tell the Aucas about Jesus. Jim and four of his friends did land on one of the beaches and were able to befriend a few of the local Aucas and they did become friends. The missionaries back home did receive regular wireless message updates.

However, on the sixth day, no radio message reached the missionary wives and they grew worried. They knew the news was not good. The next morning another missionary pilot flew over the beach to look for the men. He saw only the badly damaged plane on the beach and finally a search team found bodies of five missing missionaries who were all speared to death. But the story of the mission work did not stop there. Elisabeth Elliot, wife of Jim Elliot, along with their three-year-old daughter Valerie, and a few other missionary women stayed and eventually moved to a Auca village. They were able to share the love of Christ and eventually many Aucas Indians became Christians. One of the Auca Indian who killed Jim Elliot and his friends who later became Christian said “What brought me to Christ is the message of forgiveness. How can some one forgives a person who killed your dear one” I couldn’t understand that. This question brought me to Elisabeth Elliot and she pointed me to Christ who taught her to love her enemies and who died and rose again for all my sins and make me a Child of God.

Where are you at your life? Do you think that you are a helpless victim plagued by unfortunate events from the past? The God whom Joseph confessed and one we find in Christ-is the Elohim who can bring order, hope and purpose and forgiveness to your life? Baptism is a visual reminder that He has made you His child and He is there for you. Or is there someone in your life needing forgiveness from you? Elohim comes to you to give strength today through His communion to enable, not to withhold but offer God’s greatest forgiveness.

And now the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.