

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

I think that that very rich gospel reading that we just heard forms a nice pair with the Old Testament reading and the story of Joseph. They go well together, I think, and speak to each other. In the gospel reading we hear a very significant part of Jesus's teaching. It's straight after the Beatitudes, and he's telling his hearers how to live. I mean, there's so much good stuff in that gospel, you can't speak to everything because it's so dense. And Jesus, in that passage, sets out some very high standards for his followers, some of which aren't just challenging, but also countercultural, such as, "Do good to those who hate you, forgive and you will be forgiven."

And in the Old Testament lesson that we heard from Genesis, we get the climax of the Joseph story, which is told in great detail over many chapters in the Book of Genesis. And it strikes me that what we have in that story, and particularly in the denouement that we've just heard, is an account of what a life looks like when it's lived according to the principles that Jesus sets out in his teaching. So I'm going to look mainly at the Joseph story as an example of what Jesus is talking about in his teaching in the gospel. But first, let me offer a bit of background to the Old Testament story, which is this is a key moment, the climax of the Joseph story. But to see its significance, we have to just be aware of what's gone before. And as I say, this is a story that's told over many chapters in the Book of Genesis.

Joseph is the youngest of 12 brothers, and he's famous, as you know, as the owner of a coat of many colors given to him by his father. And he's upset his brothers when he was young by sharing a dream in which they all bow down and worship him. Now, he couldn't help having the dream, but he might've been more tactful in the way he told his brothers. But anyway, he upsets his brothers, they turn on him, strip him of his coat, throw him down a well, and sell him into slavery. And then they don't know what happens to him. But Joseph, unbeknownst to them, ends up in Egypt and does

very well for himself. He enters the civil service, comes to the attention of the Pharaoh, and ends up as the kind of prime minister of Egypt.

And whilst Joseph is thriving in Egypt, his naughty brothers back in the land of Israel are having a very rough time. There's a famine and the food runs out. So, the brothers are forced to travel to Egypt to beg for food to help them back in their homeland. So, they had no idea what's happened to Joseph. They don't even know that he's in Egypt. So, when they come before him to beg for food, they have no idea who he is. It never occurs to them that this might be their brother. And of course, in this way, Joseph's dream is fulfilled, but without the brothers knowing. For reasons I've never fully understood, Joseph doesn't reveal his identity straight away.

And there's these rather strange encounters of the brothers and Joseph, without Joseph saying who he is. Eventually he can't go on and he makes himself known to them. And that's the bit of the reading that we had this morning. Joseph announces to his brothers, "I am Joseph." That's the big reveal in the story. Joseph finally makes himself known to his brothers and they're both amazed and dismayed. And the really interesting thing is what happens next is Joseph retells the story of what's happened to them from another perspective to theirs. So he calls the brothers close and says to them, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Don't be distressed or angry because you sold me here for God sent me before you to preserve life." "God sent me here," is his theme. So notice how the "you sold" gets changed in Joseph's telling of the story to "God sent."

So, from Joseph's perspective, the brother's selling of him to Egypt can be seen as God sending him there. There are two tellings, two perspectives in this story of what's happened. Joseph saw the providential hand of God guiding him, bringing good out of evil. The hymn writer says, "God moves in mysterious ways." And this is an example of that, a young boy is sold into slavery so that his people can be saved. So God had a reason to send Joseph to Egypt. It was to enable the people of Israel to

survive the famine that was coming 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 with the lost boy made good. But Joseph tells his life as a story of God working to save his people. Joseph could have reacted very differently. This was a great opportunity for revenge. He had all the power. He could have finally got his own back on those who'd 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 knew that God was in control. He knew the truth of that passage in Romans that came up a few weeks ago, "But in all things, God works for good for those who love him." This story is an example of that being worked out in practice.

And what's striking about the story is Joseph's ability to forgive his brothers. Jesus taught, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." And Joseph shows us what this looks like in practice. He shows 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. And by choosing to forgive them, 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 he saw a grizzly bear, and this huge animal had gone into an abandoned camp and was feasting on some of the food that was left behind. And he was on his own for several minutes until a skunk sidled up and sat next to him. The bear didn't object and Carnegie knew why, it would cost him too much to get even. And what's true for grizzly bears is true for us too. 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 as we are a forgiven people. What we celebrate in this Eucharist is Jesus's great act of self-sacrifice. We remember, again, that on the cross, Jesus won our salvation. He brought us

into right relationship with God and did what needed to be done for our sins to be forgiven. In this Eucharist, we celebrate our forgiveness so how can we leave and not be people who forgive?

So, what we've seen today is how Joseph lived a life in accordance with the principles of Jesus's 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. Amen.