

Beginning Again

Scriptures: Psalm 37; Genesis 45:3-11,15; Luke 6:27-38

A Sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron, with the People of St. Mary's, Anchorage
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Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?"

But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Our first reading this morning jumps into the middle of a long story.

Perhaps you remember parts of it. We won't recount the whole thing this morning (though it's worth searching out and reading...), but let's orient ourselves a bit.

- Joseph-yes, the one with a coat of many colors-was an annoying brother.
- His brothers sold him to Egyptians rather than leaving him in to bottom of a pit.
- In Egypt, he was first a slave, then incarcerated, then became Vizier (Vuh-ZEER) of Egypt, 2nd highest ranking official....
 - From this position, he prepares Egyptians for a 7-year famine that persists throughout the Ancient Near East.
- Meanwhile, back at home, Joseph's kin were starving, and so they went to Egypt to buy food. They arrived, and were sent to the Vizier, whom they do NOT recognize as their brother....long story....there is a lot of back and forth, but finally, on their second trip to Egypt, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

As you can tell, there is enough in this extended narrative to keep us busy for many weeks. We have skipped over years of trickery and misunderstanding within the family.

At one level, we understand this story to be a complex story that explains Israel's residence (and then slavery) in Egypt. This is how they got there.

But today, in our context, I'm thinking about the window we have into a new chapter of the life of Joseph, his father Jacob, and all of their descendants.

Clearly, a page is turned. There is some sort of fresh start within this family.

Like the 'fresh starts' that we know,
this one is not completely new, or fresh.

There is plenty of shared history that is never fully erased.

But it is also not simply a continuation of that history. There is a significant break in the storyline.

I admit that I see this story through the lens of beginning anew in part because I have recently binged *1883*, an ongoing story of pioneers headed to Oregon. You know the trope, and the history...they cross harsh and unknown land hoping for new lives.

These new lives will be forged in out of what's left of the things they left with,
out of relationships gained and lost along the way,

and in a place that is vastly different than they imagined when they left.

Along the way, pioneers find that their patterns of living don't match their new lives. Their manners, their way of dress, their social norms...all are transformed by their experiences.

A famine. Siblings, traveling to another country, seeking what they need....

Pioneers, traveling through a harsh place that they would not have chosen

in hope of a new life....and struggling to discover what it will be, and who they will be in that new place....

These feel very familiar right now.

And so, unsurprisingly, I find some help for our way in today's readings.

I cannot recommend Joseph as a model for our behavior all along the way--especially if you read his long story. He's quite a rascal at times. AND...he also creates space to begin again.

We are not told what inner work he did during the time that he was enslaved, imprisoned, or in power,

but we can see that he has remembered his history--he has looked at it honestly--his brothers intended harm for him--and he has also seen that even the history that he would not have chosen has been turned for good. He reads his own history, and the history of his clan, as a part of God's history.

And out of that, he is able to offer a fresh start.

I suspect that Joseph had recited many times the Psalm that Andrew canted for us this morning

Do not fret yourself because of evildoers....do not fret yourself over the once who succeeds in evil schemes....

...Deliverance comes from God...God will be our refuge....

And the Gospel.

Michael has dealt with its complexity a number of times. (If you're interested, email me and I'll find you a copy of one of those excellent sermons.)

Today, what I hear there is this:

Sometimes, the Way of following Jesus is to be the one to Go First.

Forgive First.

Turn toward Good First.

Forget the Wrongs First.

We are remembering our shared history at St. Mary's in a project called *Stories*.

It is a way of also looking to our future-- part of a process that we undertake once a decade or so to reflect together (=discern) about where we are going.

What ministries and mission are we being called to? What can we imagine ourselves to be and become?

But first, we remember who we have been, and who we are.

In this case, we remember what we Left Home with some 2 years ago
now that we can, we believe, see the New Place on the horizon.

We will, together, fashion life in a New Place.

Some of what we cherished will remain intact.

Some will be changed.

And in all things, we will be accompanied by each other,
and the remarkable transforming presence of God, our Refuge.

As we prepare for that moment, let us
remember our history honestly, AND with eyes of Grace

let us
refrain from fretting over those who have refrained from doing the Right Things

and let us
be quick to forgive, making haste to offer real opportunity for new beginnings.