

Focus: The Good News is the God of Abraham and Isaac is also our God, a most merciful Father.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Joseph is a fool.

At least in the context of 21st century Washington, DC,
or just about any other major city on the globe.

By all accounts, Joseph is the hard-to-deal-with little brother
who is not only a smart aleck,
but seems to be his dad's favorite son.

So, what do his brothers do?

Well, first they dump him into a deep pit,
then, rather than killing him,
they sell him off into slavery.

The brothers tell dad that Joseph is dead,
and go on living their lives in relative peace and normalcy.

On the other hand,

Joseph gets dragged to Egypt as a slave.

Once he gets to Egypt, a series of apparently lucky breaks
lands him in the position of prime minister to the Pharaoh.

Not a bad job, especially for a Hebrew in a foreign land.

Then, one day, many years after being sold off as a slave,
his brothers appear in Egypt before Pharaoh's court.

Who meets with them?

None other than Joseph.

Ah, here's the chance of a lifetime.

Not only don't they know that Joseph is still alive,
they have no clue he is the bureaucrat they are to meet.

Now, Joseph has an opportunity to settle a long-overdue score.

So, Joseph does exactly what we don't expect.

He welcomes his brothers with open arms,
and immediately inquiries of his father's well-being.

His welcome catches his brothers by surprise.

They are dismayed—uneasy—
with his openness and warmth.

“What is this guy up to?” they are thinking.

“What will happen next?”

Next?

Well, Joseph tells them that he forgives them,
and that he didn't realize it when it happened,
but God actually wanted them to sell Joseph into slavery,
so that he could later offer them refuge during the famine.
Then, he tells them to go and get their father and return.

Joseph is a fool.

Here he has a perfectly good reason
to be angry with his cruel, uncaring brothers,
and he apparently wastes it by not only welcoming them,
but *forgiving* them for what they did.
I don't know about you,
but my experiences in life lead me to believe
that no one in a political office in this area would be so forgiving.
We can't seem to let former officeholders
quietly disappear into retirement,
let alone forgive them.
What would we do with a bunch of people like Joseph's brothers?

Would you be so quick to welcome them back into *your* life?
Would you be so quick to *forgive* them
for making *your* life so miserable?
I'm not so certain that I would be.
What is Joseph doing?
What is he up to?

Not only does Joseph tell his brothers
that he forgives them for all that they had done,
he actually gives God *credit* for all the challenges he experienced
because of what his brothers had done.
He tells his brothers that God had planned all along
for Joseph to be in Egypt during the famine,
so they would have a place to go so they might survive.
It was all of God's plan to keep the Chosen People alive
in a time of famine, so that they could eventually
return to their land and prosper,
just as God had promised to Abraham and Sarah.
When it looked like God was not going to keep the covenant,
God acted in an unexpected way

to aid the Hebrew people so that they would survive the famine and later become that great nation God promised for them.

In the Psalm today,
we hear the psalmist tell a very similar story.
“Trust in the Lord,” the psalmist writes.
The Lord will provide justice and prosperity
to those who do not take matters into their own hands.
Just as Joseph was patient—
he spent over 13 years in Egypt
before meeting up again with his brothers—
the psalmist tells us to be patient, too.
In time, the “wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place,
they will not be there.”¹
And, while you are at it, the psalmist writes,
don’t just be patient, but don’t get angry
and don’t try to “rush God” into addressing the situation.
All will work out in due time.
Why? Well, as we hear in the last two verses,
because the salvation of the righteous
comes from God, and God will rescue those
who seek refuge in him.²

Joseph and the psalmist show us
that we should be patient and trust in the Lord.
Jesus reminds the disciples of this
in the second part of the Sermon on the Plain.
To love one’s enemies is not a new commandment or teaching.
It can be found in the words of Moses in Exodus
as well as in Proverbs.
Just as the Beatitudes seem to place conventional wisdom on its head,
so do Jesus’ words to the disciples this morning.
We are to love our enemies and be good to those who aren’t good to us.
This is a common theme throughout Luke’s account.
Luke’s account doesn’t tell us *when*
the poor and oppressed will receive their reward,

¹ Psalm 37:10 (LBW)

² Psalm 37:39-40 (LBW)

or even what that reward will be.
All we know is that the reward will be given.

We should remember that Christ's coming
is *not* simply to meet our creature comforts,
or to seek out revenge for past wrongdoings.
Instead, as Luke makes clear for us,
Christ came to serve and care for the poor,
marginalized, oppressed, and overlooked in society.
He came to heal the sick, drive out demons,
and bless the children.
In his preaching and teaching,
Jesus wanted the people—then and now—
to envision life in the new kingdom.
We are called to envision life where individual
power and needs are not the priority,
but the interests of the entire community are.
We are to extend every courtesy
to our fellow human beings.
It's easy for us to reach out and help those who are our friends.
Jesus tells us that acting well to our friends is a "given,"
but that the real challenge we face—
the real mark of understanding the Gospel—
is to aid, assist, and most importantly *love* our enemies.

This runs counter to what we have been taught.
Society teaches us to look out for ourselves—
to make sure we're taken care of first, and then,
maybe, if there is something left over,
to give it to others.
Jesus reminds us that our God is a merciful God,
and we, too, should be merciful toward others.
Mercy is a sign of love.

On this day in 1546, Martin Luther died.
In 1532, he wrote these words about this text:
"God has commanded me to let my love go out to my neighbor
and be kindly disposed to all,
whether they be my friends or enemies,
just as our heavenly Father himself does.
He allows his sun to rise and shine on the good and evil,

and is most kind to those who are constantly dishonoring him....
Why does he do this?
Out of sheer, pure love,
of which his heart is full to overflowing,
and which he pours out freely over every one without exception.”³

God loves us.
In our baptism,
God chooses us and makes us his children.
He forgives us all our sin, and makes us part of the righteous.
When we come to the Table to receive the Body and Blood of Christ,
we receive a visible sign of God’s grace—
freely given and wholly undeserved.
God is merciful,
and we should be merciful, too.
Joseph understood this.
Joseph was no fool. Amen.

³ *Luther’s Works* (American Edition), 51:267