

Sunday August 16th, Sermon
Based on Genesis 45:1-15

As famous bible stories go, Joseph's story is right up there with Adam and Eve, Noah, and the parting of the Red Sea. Perhaps made all the more familiar and famous through the musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat". In today's Hebrew Scripture reading we hear a bit from the end of that story.

To bring us up to speed, Joseph was the son of Jacob in his later years and from the wife he loved, Rachel. Joseph got special treatment, including a coat of many colours (or long sleeves, depends on the translation you read). Joseph also had dreams that made it pretty clear he saw himself in a place of authority over his older brothers. His brothers were not very happy with all this and were filled with jealousy of him. So when the opportunity presented itself, they made a plan to kill Joseph. One of the brothers, Reuben, argues for keeping him alive and long story short they sell him to slave traders who take him to Egypt.

While in Egypt, over many years, Joseph's life takes him from being a respected slave, to time in prison, to the interpreter of Pharaoh's dreams which allow Egypt to prepare for an on-coming famine. When we arrive at today's passage, Joseph is governor over the land, and although not recognized at first by his brother's who've come searching for aid, he makes himself known to them.

This passage gives us a sense of resolution to the story. It would appear, according to Joseph's understanding, that even the darkest moments of the story, like his being sold into slavery and his time in prison, were never out of God's hands, so to speak. As he says in vs. 5, "for God sent me before you to preserve life".

Despite the evil intent of his brothers, despite the chaos of false accusations and imprisonment, despite being alone in a land far from home and from anyone known to him, Joseph's story speaks to the intention of God to bring life out of chaos, meaning out of randomness.

Seems there were these three professionals sitting debating which profession had been around the longest.

The Doctor says, "Well, the Bible says that God took a rib out of Adam to make woman. Since that clearly required surgery, then the oldest profession is surely medicine."

The Engineer shakes his head and replies, "No, no. The Bible also says that God created the world out of void and chaos. To do that, God must surely have been an engineer. Therefore, Engineering is the oldest profession."

The Lawyer smiles smugly and leans discreetly forward. "Ah," he says, "but who do you think created the Chaos?"

I am fascinated by quantum physics and chaos theory. And I will fully admit I understand very little about it all. According to Wikipedia (which we all know is the place to go when we want to understand something) chaos theory *is an interdisciplinary theory stating that, within the apparent randomness of [chaotic complex systems](#), there are underlying patterns, interconnectedness.*

To put it very simply, though we may look at something that is happening or unfolding and it appears chaotic, there is, overall, a pattern occurring. And that pattern takes the system, what is unfolding, to a place of resolution.

I bring this complicated theory into our contemplation today because I believe it speaks to a truth that can be found not only in the scientific world, but also theologically. A truth that is, as much as we wrestle with this, a mystery that is beyond us, but none-the-less true.

Some may say, according to how they read Joseph's explanation of events, that God caused all to happen so that in the end the nation of Israel would be saved from the devastation of famine by finding relief in Egypt.

As always, we are invited to read this story and all biblical stories in light of the whole, and particular, in light of the gospel. I do not believe that Joseph is suggesting that the evil intent of his brothers was from God. Rather, I hear Joseph saying that God used all that was unfolding in such a way as to bring about a positive resolution. Though his brothers intended to kill him, though Potiphar's wife through her false accusation intended to be rid of him, God worked in such a way as to bring about the hope of life for the nation of Israel.

I encourage you, if you are feeling a bit lost, to read Genesis 37 to 45.

I offer this thought that not only in theory (some might say theology) but also in the natural world (quantum physics) there are patterns and resolution despite the seeming randomness of what we see unfolding. Again, hear me. I am not suggesting that the randomness when it is dark and evil, like the intention to kill Joseph, the death of George Floyd or the lived experience of having Covid-19 are in any way coming from the heart of God. The biblical witness challenges that understanding on every level.

However, that darkness, evil and randomness does not happen outside of God's ability to bring about resolution, life, redemption, resurrection.

Personally I am able to hold this mystery that makes little sense in our linear, historical and rational way of looking at the world, by thinking of God as outside of time and history. Where Joseph and his family experience the story in a linear fashion, God holds it all at once.

Of course we do not see this in the way that God does. We simply can't.

But we do get glimpses and I believe the glimpses are meant to give us hope and comfort in the midst of all the seeming randomness of life that so often creates despair in our hearts.

For example (and these are imperfect examples),

The Coronavirus which has had an unbelievable, and sometimes devastating impact on all parts of our lives has also created an environment where premature births have decreased due to less pollution and stress. Air pollution is down, beaches are cleaner for lack of tourism.

The brutal and unnecessary death of George Floyd has brought about a world-wide movement against racism and we can only hope, real and permanent change.

The pain and suffering and death that result from Covid-19 is most definitely not from God (in my understanding). Nor is the horrific death of George Floyd or any other person on the basis of their race or gender. Yet, the Creator of the Universe, with a broken heart, holds these events and all the events that unfold around them, large and small, and draws it all towards a place of redemption, life, resurrection.

Meaning is for God to make. Meaning unfolds for us. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:12,

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Or from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message*...

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

In our present world, torn by so much suffering and heartbreak, people are looking to make meaning out of the senselessness, the randomness of the darkness. Could it be that this understanding of God holding all the randomness somehow in the great mystery of love, directing it and us towards a place of resolution, of life, provides for us and others a place of hope to rest in? It doesn't tell us how the story will end, but it does tell us that the story is written with purpose and meaning and with the end point being life. Life for all.

Amen.