

“Preservation” Sermon

September 17, 2017

Genesis 50:15-21, Roman 14:7-12. Matthew
18:21-25

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (Acts 9:1-6).

Joseph’s brothers sought to preserve their lives, their heritage, and their families by deceiving him. They were willing to lie on their now dead father. Just as when they sold Joseph into slavery, they saw preservation one way, through deceit, but God had something else in mind.

1. They wanted to preserve their lives from the consequences of their actions. “Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead,

they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’”

Too many times we live our lives dumping our own trash in someone else’s can. Psychology calls this “projection.” We project when we defend against our own fears, unconscious impulses and qualities by denying the existence of them in us and attributing them to others.

2. Joseph clarified to whom judgment for injustice belongs: 19 But Joseph said to them “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?”

Yes. God holds us responsible for what we think and what we put into motion. The passive-aggressive personality likes to “throw the rock while hiding the hand.” Yet God has not given us the power of life and death over others. In fact the commandment is clear, “You shall not kill.” In saying this Joseph acknowledged God’s grace,

not only for his brothers, but also for the human family. We are not in the place of God. We cannot condemn and exclude others as if we were perfect, without many faults. We like to sing,

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Yet how many of us really accept the truth that we have all sinned and fall short of God's glory?

This does not mean that we should not warn.

Warning is our prophetic responsibility as God's people, but judgment as to the worth and potential and possibilities of another human being is in God's hands.

3. God unwittingly used them in their treachery. "20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

God's plan is bigger than our treachery. God's solution is more powerful than the problems and

chaos we create. What seems like a failed project, God takes as an opportunity for grace.

4. Because they are the children of Israel, and the brothers of Joseph, they are entitled to grace: 21 “So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Jesus reminded Peter, if you stop putting a limit on the grace you show each other, the quality of life in the world will change. Jesus’ parable informs us regarding the slave who had been released from the debt of ten thousand talents by his master. One talent is equal to six thousand denarii. This same slave who was forgiven 60 million denarii turned around and was abusive and enslaved the man who owed him a hundred denarii. When we show mercy, we are acting out God’s love in us and for us. God’s promise to those who act out God’s love

is that thousands of our generations will likewise receive mercy.

Saul of Tarsus was sincere. Saul thought he was doing God's will. No human being could convince him that he was wrong, but because his intent was good, and his heart was right, God in mercy revealed to him his real purpose in life. What Saul did in his persecution of the church had been evil, but God raised Saul up to ultimately use him for the spread of Christ's good news. God has a preservation plan for each of us, something better, something glorious, something more wonderful than we can even ask or think. Amen.