**“A Wondrous Silence”**

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Genesis 30:22-24

Lenten Midweek 2

**SERMON READING** Genesis 37:12-36

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And **a Man found him wandering in the fields. And the Man asked him, “What are you seeking?” “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” And the Man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan**.

They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and **we will see what will become of his dreams**.” But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?” Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not.” And he identified it and said, “It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.” Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**3**

The **punishment didn’t fit the crime**. What was Joseph so guilty of? What had he done that was so bad, and deserving of what he’d gotten? What crimes did he commit? Sure, his father Jacob (also known as Israel) showed favoritism toward him over his eleven brothers (gave him that special “robe of many colors”), but Joseph had no control over that. Sure, it might have been wiser had he kept his dreams of ruling over his other brothers to himself. He’d done no favors for himself by telling his brothers about their “sheaves of grain **bowing down to his**—or about the sun, moon and **exactly-eleven** stars **bowing down to him**, but his father had rebuked him for talking like that, and **that should have settled the matter**. But it didn’t with the brothers. They let it fester and planned taking vengeance—but **their vengeance that didn’t fit the crime**.

Anger boiled out of control. Wickedness and the plan to sin snowballed. Brothers **considered and discussed** murdering even their own brother: “Come now, let us **kill** Joseph and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and **we will see what will become of his dreams**”. Only Reuben’s last-minute intervening saved Joseph from that death. But the rest found a fate almost as bad for him: selling him into slavery for just the small sum of twenty shekels of silver (**maybe** $200). Then, they broke their father’s heart by telling him that his son had died. How **hard hearts were** of brothers for a brother and father, just watching as dad mourned, saying: “I will go to **my** grave (Sheol) in grief”.

But before condemning Joseph’s brothers / Jacob’s sons, don’t forget how, maybe, similar we can be. Holding grudges and staying angry is **how we kill people many times over**. Relationships we may have we broken, **deciding over and over and over again** to stay separated and unmoving, destroying bonds that were once there with the callousness of **not a care at all**? How many parents have dealt with **our deceit and disrespected / treachery?** Sin is sin, and the boys then had nothing (too much) on ours. Joseph’s brothers (as a matter of fact) might find **understanding pals** of folks around here … maybe with some of us.

**2**

But the shocking thing about this text isn’t the **wickedness of men**, but (rather) **the silence of God**. Jacob’s family were to become the population of God’s chosen nation (just birthed out of just their family. All of God’s promises for salvation and forgiveness and life was to **come through them**. From them (that dad, Jacob and one of his deceitful boys) would come **the Christ … Jesus**. Yet how does He (God) keep this family “in line” (faithful / good / caring)? He doesn’t do anything, it appears. Martin Luther called it, here, “A **Wondrous Silence**”, writing: “**God** lets this all happen. He **seems** quiet, still, sleeping, deaf and completely hardened. **Compassion can’t be seen**, and He acts as if He dear Joseph isn’t even **known by Him**. The Heavens are silent as the **brotherly treasure of Joseph is snatched to Egypt**. … What’s God doing with all His chosen ones? … Why does He appear to forsake them all so miserably?”

**Why** does God allow this to happen? **Why** is He silent? **Why** doesn’t He intervene? **Why** didn’t Jacob see the risk in sending Joseph up to Shechem to find his brothers? **That** wasn’t a wise move, under the circumstance. And once Joseph got to Shechem and couldn’t find his brothers, **Who is the “Stranger”** Who just happens to know that the brothers and their flocks had moved on to Dothan? If not for **that “Stranger”** (or **was He a “Stranger**”?), Joseph might have turned around and went home, safe for the moment. He may have never been sold into slavery … never ended up in Egypt … never **saved his family from famine (as it turned out)**. There would have been **no Pharaoh encounter with God’s people / no Moses / no exodus**. The **Old Testament (all of it)—the entire history of our salvation—hinged on that “Stranger” at Shechem who asked Joseph, “What are you seeking?”** God just **let it all happen—lets the tragedies and triumphs unfold without so much as lifting a noticeable finger**. God is silent, yet it’s “A Wondrous Silence”.

Perhaps St. Paul had **Joseph in mind** when he wrote to the Romans these words: “for whatever was written in former days was **written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope**” (Romans 15:4). **Joseph teaches hope**. **Joseph teaches us how to receive the silence of God in faith, for we’ve all wondered, “Where in the world is God?”** **As tragedy unfolds and temptation engulfs, and conflicts escalate, where (we wonder) is God?** Surely Joseph asked that as the Ishmaelites bound him and took him from the midst of brothers down to Egypt. It’s unfair / unjust! For punishment for poor Joseph didn’t fit the crime.

**1**

And **it’s all for our comfort—since poor Joseph ought to remind us of poor Jesus**. What happened to Joseph **fore-shadows what happened, then, to Jesus**. As Joseph got thrown into a pit and sold to slavery in Egypt, Luther says that: “Joseph was dead and buried. He **had his Good Friday**. … **His father also dies but they are both raised again by the power of God who can even make the dead alive.** **The heart of a believer lives and rises again even if ten worlds bury him**.” ….

Poor Joseph. His punishment was **unfair and unjust**—and **he was alone**. There was no one there to rescue and deliver **him**. There was only “A **wondrous silence**”, like, almost, the **silence of Good Friday: “My God, my God, why have you forsake Me?”** The One crying from the cross was, also, a Son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob / our brother. And **His punishment (crucifixion) didn’t fit His crime. His punishment is being killed by brothers / murder (even first degree by willful sinning and horrible and hard-hearted decisions)**. It’s **unfair and unjust**. What was **Jesus** guilty of? Nothing. What had He done that was so bad? Nothing. What crimes had He committed? None, **yet He (Jesus) hung by nails for all crimes (all of them) of his brothers and sisters (us)**. He **hung there, for you and me punished** … for **our crimes**, He took it all. **We do the sin and He got the nails**. **We push Him away (reject Him with much to much regularity, if at all) and He stretched out His arms to embrace the Roman torture of a cross**. **He bore our sins so that we might be forgiven, freed to be full of His life**.

**When God is silent in your life, do not lose hope.**

**THE FAITHFUL HANG ON … FAITH CLINGS EVEN TO THE SILENCE OF GOD**.

When He **seems quiet, still, maybe distant, trust**. When **trials and temptations are yours to face (and you must)**, remember that **He works even in “Wondrous Silence”**. He **works all things (He promised) for your eternal Good**.

He watched quietly as Joseph was dropped into the depths of a pit, yet **raised Joseph, and through him saved His people by raising them from bondage**. **God has saved you from your sins through Jesus**. In the **quiet splash of your Baptism …** in the **preaching of His promises you have to hear** … in the **food given to you of His own body and blood** … God is **at work** **giving you eternal Good**. **He died for the brother and sisterhood of every person to Him**. Amen.