

We have come to the final week of our sermon series on the book of Genesis.
Unlike other “books” that we read,
such as the Harry Potter books,
We are left to wonder what was the author trying to say this whole time.
Were we supposed to solve some sort of puzzle or mystery by the end?
Or maybe we were supposed to have come to realize what true romance looks like.
Possibly, the author wants us to be so intrigued that we are willing to go see the film adaptation of the story.
No,
when we finish reading the book of Genesis,
we get no such answers.
We are not told “who done it”
or did this guy end up with that girl...
Instead,
the end of the book of Genesis,
leads us right where we started...
Wondering what is God trying to speak to us in this ancient story?
Whereas I don’t believe that the bible ever can be “solved”
I do believe however that there is an overarching narrative,
from beginning to end.
Not just in one book of the bible,
but throughout the entire canon of scripture.
I am finding it interesting each week as I begin to think about what am I going to say you all,
that just when I think God has left me to tell you some irrelevant message,
God reveals through a variety of ways what it is I am supposed to talk to you about.
Our reading in Genesis this week,
not only gives us a really important principle that we should try to adhere to,
but it also was a common theme in many of my conversations this week.
Let’s look at our story again.
We heard last week that Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers;
And that he was carted off to Egypt.
Now in our reading today,
We must realize that several years have passed.
During that time Joseph went from being a measly slave,
to becoming a person in high authority in Egypt.
It would be like you or I were in prison today,
released to be a door greeter at wal-mart,
and after some lucky breaks,
and divine appointments,
becoming the president of the United States or Bill Gates.
Joseph had gained a place of high influence in Egypt.
Thus he was able to control many of the economic and political forces during his time.
Also during this several year span,
Joseph’s family,
was dealing with extreme economic shortcomings,
lack of food,
and severe hardships.
Because Joseph’s family was in such dire straights,

they made their way to Egypt to ask for assistance.
Joseph's family was completely unaware of his stature,
and financial place of influence,
because they had assumed that he either was still a slave,
or even worse,
dead.

In our reading today we pick up the story after Joseph's brothers have come to ask for help,
because they are facing such a bleak situation.

After hearing the plight of his family,
Joseph decides he can no longer take the heartache of his family,
and reveals his identity to his brothers.

Genesis says,

"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.

Then Joseph said to his brothers,
come closer to me.

And they came closer to him.

He said, I am your brother, Joseph,
whom you sold into Egypt.

and now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves,
because you sold me here;

For God sent me before you to preserve life."

WOW!

Can you believe that?

Here is Joseph,

who had been sold into slavery by his own family,
only after it was determined that killing him wasn't an option,
forgiving the very ones that wronged him to such an extreme.

How is this possible?

How is it that someone can experience such deceit,
violence and indifference at the hands of the of the individuals who are to love him the most,
and Joseph forgives them!

I don't know about you,

But I don't know if I could do that...

But the thing is...

We are called to do that!

Say it ain't so Karl,

don't tell us that we are supposed to forgive those that hurt us the most!

That is exactly what Joseph's story,
and the entire gospel message is about.

The whole point of why we gather each Sunday,
is because we have been forgiven,

when all logic says we shouldn't have been.

Our collect this morning puts it so beautifully,

(read collect)

God gave his Only Son FOR US as a sacrifice for sin;
In relation to who God is,
the all-knowing, unchanging being that we have discussed for the past 2 months,
gave that which was most valuable to Him,
His SON,
on our behalf so that we could be forgiven for the most heinous things we are capable of.
And the cost to us,
well the cost to us can be found in the Lord's prayer that we recite each week,
"Lord forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us."
Jesus reminds us,
that those that have been forgiven much,
must forgive much.
The great English poet and priest George Herbert said this,
""He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass."
When I was at Yale,
we had the opportunity to hear from a variety of speakers,
who had a variety of experiences.
One of the most amazing speakers I heard while at school,
was the bishop of Rwanda,
whose name was John Rucyahana.
Bishop Rucyahana was in charge of the church of Rwanda
during the mass genocide that occurred there in the 1990's,
in which over one million people were brutally rape, beaten and killed.
The violence was so horrendous and devastating to the very fabric of the Rwandan people,
that only God could destroy such evil.
The bishop told us that God is in fact doing an amazing work of reconciliation in Rwanda.
He repeated story after story,
of how the victims of the genocide,
have been able to come face to face with their attackers,
and show them forgiveness for the most awful crimes.
The bishop himself experienced this spirit of forgiveness first hand.
He told us how his 16 year old niece,
whom he dearly loved,
was raped and killed in a torturous and horrible way.
And how several years later when he came face to face with her killer,
he knew he had to forgive through his pain and tears.
He also spoke of countless women who had been brutally attacked by men in their villages,
and then,
meeting each other years later and both victim and criminal breaking down in tears as forgiveness was
extended.
It was an amazing story of how the grace of God,
can heal ALL our wounds,
if we are willing to allow God to do such a work.
Maybe this is you today.
Maybe there is someone in your life who has wronged you,
maybe not on the same level as I speaking of,
but nonetheless,

You feel like you have been hurt by another person.
As we have heard Joseph's story today,
it is possible God might be speaking to us,
that we need to forgive those that have hurt us.
I know for me,
this is always a challenge.
It is so much easier and self-gratifying to stay wounded than to forgive.
I cherish the feeling that someone has wronged me,
and they need to know it,
and that the only way there is any chance of forgiveness,
is if they come on their hands and knees groveling.
But that's the challenge of our story today.
We read that Joseph told his brothers,
"Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves..."
Joseph never gave the culprits the chance to apologize,
out of grace he offered forgiveness to those that harmed him.
But why?
Because Joseph knew that the only way that he could help his family,
was to look past their most grievous sins,
and offer forgiveness.
The author of Genesis writes,
"God sent me before you to preserve life.
For the famine has been in the land...
God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth,
And to keep alive for you many survivors."
Joseph loves and cares for his family so much so,
that he is willing to put aside his most justified greivens,
so that he might cause the family to come together so that they could survive.
Joseph had recognized that God had allowed the hardships to happen to him,
so that he might be able to help his family.
Is this us today?
Is God calling us to put aside some of grievences against each other for the sake of our church family?
Is there someone who has hurt you in our church,
that up to this point you have been unable to forgive?
Maybe God is calling us to forgive each other,
so that we might be unified,
So that we here at St. Paul's might survive,
and thrive for years to come.
The Psalmist tells us today,
"Oh,
How good and pleasant when brethren live together in unity!"
Not only is good for us the church to forgive each other,
but it is good for us as individuals.
The 18th c. abolitionist and Anglican Hanah More once said,
"A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the
cost of hatred, and the waste of spirit."
When we forgive those that have hurt us,
we are able to find peace in our own lives.

When we hold onto grudges and bitterness,
it can eat at us,
cause us stress and anxiety,
not to mention,
our own ability to receive forgiveness.
If there is someone who you need to forgive,
or some hurt you need to let go,
I want to encourage us that as we come to receive the body and blood of our Lord,
that we leave those pains at the altar,
and offer forgiveness in your hear to those who have offended you,
and if need be,
to seek them out and tell them,
"Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves,
Because you have sold me here;
For God sent me before you to preserve life."
Amen.