

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany – February 24, 2019

Genesis 45:3-8a,15

3 Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

The Masked Singer is one of the newer TV shows that started airing back in January. It is a celebrity singing competition where each episode the singer with the least number of votes from the audience is eliminated. The show’s twist is that each celebrity is wearing a costume and mask to hide their identity. It is the job of a celebrity panel of judges to guess their identity based on their singing and various clues that the celebrity gives. When a singer is eliminated they take off their mask to reveal their true identity. Sometimes the judges get it right and sometimes they are shocked at who is revealed. Our sermon text for this morning also had a revealing moment that is shocking to the audience as Joseph makes himself known to his brothers. But that is not the only revealing that takes place. As we are focusing in Epiphany on Jesus revealing himself today we see him revealing himself in the lives of believers. As we look at the life of Joseph and also our own life we will see that **Our Faith Reveals Our Savior**, first **through forgiving love** and also **through unquestioning trust**.

The story of Joseph’s life is quite remarkable and begins back in Genesis chapter 37. Joseph was one of twelve brothers who were sons of Jacob and great-grandsons of Abraham. Joseph’s brothers were jealous of the special attention he received from his father and wanted to be rid of him. Instead of killing him, they sold him off into slavery at the age of 17. Down in Egypt he landed as a servant in Potiphar’s household until Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him of adultery and he was thrown into prison. While there with the Lord’s help he was able to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh’s baker and cupbearer, which later would give him an audience with Pharaoh when he needed his dreams interpreted. When it was revealed that there would be seven years of good harvests followed by seven years of famine, Pharaoh appointed Joseph as second-in-command and charged him with storing up food from the good years to get ready for the years of famine.

The famine was widespread and brought Joseph’s brothers down to Egypt needing food. On their first trip, Joseph did not reveal himself, but wanted to learn more about them and see if they had changed. He said they could only return if they brought their youngest brother with them. When they did come back for more food, they brought Benjamin with them and Joseph devised one more test. He had his silver cup placed in Benjamin’s sack and sent his servants after them, accusing them of being thieves. When Joseph said that only Benjamin would have to be punished, Judah stood up for him and would not give up his brother to save his own life.

This is where chapter 45 picks up. After seeing his brothers stand up for Benjamin and not do the same thing to him they had done to Joseph, he could not contain his secret any longer. In verses 3 & 4 he revealed that he was Joseph, the brother they had sold into Egypt, the brother

they probably thought after 22 years was dead. The revealing of Joseph's identity could have gone a couple of different ways. His brothers' initial reaction showed what they expected. "They were terrified at his presence" (v. 3). Joseph was now a powerful man, second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. No one would have questioned his motives if he had thrown his brothers into prison for what they had done or even had them executed. But instead Joseph's actions revealed his faith and his love for the Lord. He did not get revenge, instead he forgave them. He told them in verse 5, "Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." He had not held onto his anger over all those years and he did not want them to do the same. Joseph had never received an apology from his brothers or waited for them to make it up to him. He had simply forgiven them out of love. Such love is only possible through God. Joseph could only show this grace and mercy because the Lord had done the same for him. This forgiveness was more than just words, at the end of our text Joseph "kissed all his brothers and wept over them" (v. 15). In his actions, Joseph was revealing his Savior, displaying his forgiving love to his brothers.

When someone wrongs us or does something to hurt us our natural reaction is to return the favor or plot our revenge. If someone takes something that belongs to us, we should take something that belongs to them. If someone says something means or damages our reputation, then we have a right to do the same to them. Our world thinks this is only fair and even the just thing to do. If you forgive, then you are considered weak and everyone will just walk all over you. In these situations Jesus' command in our gospel lesson (Luke 6:27-38) to love our enemies would seem ludicrous and patently unfair. It is one thing to love and forgive our friends, that is hard enough, but to treat our enemies as our friends makes no sense at all.

Such forgiving love, even for our enemies, is only possible through our Savior. Jesus forgives us of all our sins, even though we do not deserve it. He promises us an eternal life in heaven even though what we deserve is an eternal death in hell. Only when someone knows the love of Jesus in their own lives are they able to show this same forgiving love to others. And so we forgive others, even when they don't seem to deserve it, even when they haven't apologized, because that is what Jesus has done for us. There are two benefits in this. One is our own peace of mind. If we hold onto grudges and what people have done to us, it will eat away at us and poison our lives. But when we forgive and let things go, it will bring us peace as it did to Joseph. We may never be able to fully forget what someone has done to us, but the sooner we forgive it and let it go, the sooner we will be able to move on and find peace in our lives. The other benefit is for those we are forgiving. Like Joseph's brothers, it's not something they would expect. Yet in our actions we are revealing our Savior and his love. Whether they are a believer or not, this allows them to see the power that Jesus has for their own lives as well.

In addition to that forgiving love, Joseph was also revealing the Lord through his unquestioning trust. Verses 7 & 8: "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." Put yourself in Joseph's position. Imagine being exiled and cut off from your family for over twenty years. They probably think you're dead and gone. And yet he didn't blame them or hold them responsible. Part of that came from forgiveness. Part of that also came from his trust in the Lord. He knew that the Lord could take all the bad things that happened in his life and use them for good. In his case he was able to provide food for the famine. But it was more than that. By preserving his family, his father and brothers, the Lord was preserving the line of the Savior, a great deliverance that would be for all people of all time.

When things go wrong in our lives or not according to our plans, our natural reaction at best is to question God and his plans and at worst to blame him for our problems. In the moment it is hard to see how anything good will come out of the bad that has happened. And yet by grace he has given us a faith to trust in him and believe in his promise to work out all things for our good. He never has promised that bad things won't happen to us, but that he will get us through this life to our eternal good in heaven. Sometimes we will clearly see the good, even if it takes some time, like Joseph. Other times we will not. But again there are two benefits to an unquestioning trust in our Savior. First, it gives us hope. When things are falling apart all around us, we know the Lord is in control and will bring us through this crisis as well. Second, it benefits others. As we reveal our Savior through our unquestioning trust, others will see our calm in the face of the storm and want the same for themselves. We can share with them the reason for our hope and pray for the Holy Spirit to work that same trust in their hearts.

The very end of verse 15 mentions that "afterwards [Joseph's] brothers talked with him." Can you imagine that conversation? They would have had a lot to catch up on after all those years. Their emotions would have been all over the place as they shared the stories of what had happened to them since they had last seen each other. Such conversations are really the goal in our own lives as well. Our faith reveals our Savior. As we lovingly show forgiveness to others we get to tell them the story of how God has forgiven our sins through Jesus our Savior and how we have peace. As we unquestioningly trust our Lord to rule our lives we get to tell others about the eternal plans he has for us all and how we have hope. As we reveal our Savior, as we tell these stories, we ask the Lord to give to others this same peace and hope that we enjoy. Amen.