

Genesis 50:15-21, Hebrews 12:1-3  
Morning Mercies: Easter Sunday  
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It's Easter Sunday, the day in which we share the best news the world has ever known. But that news only comes after three days of darkness. As one famous preacher has put it, it may be Friday, but Sunday's coming. The incredible paradox of the story of Jesus of Nazareth is that only after the hardship does the victory come. The path to glory is laid in painful steps. Without the Cross of Calvary, Resurrection joy just doesn't make sense. This is the great dichotomy of Christianity.

We have a saying in our house: There are two types of people in the world, those who have been broken and those who will be. And those who have yet to be broken should pray that there are people near to them who have who can walk with them. We all face dark days, we will all have Good Fridays.

The God we celebrate and worship together this morning, the God who in Jesus Christ overcame the grave, is the God we meet in the tensions of life—between brokenness and forgiveness, between heartache and hope. There's another story that captures that paradox; it's the story of Joseph. Joseph is the beloved son of Jacob, one of the patriarchs of the book of Genesis. He was a man who at a young age was given a vision of greatness, but his road of redemption brought him to the depth, and lifted him to the heights. So if you would, please stand with me in honor and reverence for God's Word and listen to the word of the Lord.

**When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

Joseph was a kid who had a big vision for his life. But that vision was shattered when his older brothers had finally gotten fed up with the favoritism he was shown by their father Jacob. So they sold him as a slave to a caravan headed for Egypt.

Soon, Joseph found himself languishing away in the depths of an Egyptian jail. Joseph had fallen about as far as anyone could go, he was in a bottom place of life. But it was there in the bottom place that he encountered the relentless love of God. And that was a turning point in his life.

Sooner or later, we all find ourselves on the bottom of life. Amy and I found ours two weeks ago. After an absolutely incredible morning, in which we felt so well loved and our hearts were so full of joy and gratitude, a horrific car accident took place. The last two weeks were the most shattering and gut-wrenching experience of our lives.

I have to admit, there were times when I thought it was over. God met us at the bottom.

It's only when you have nowhere else to turn, when all your strength is exhausted, when it's God plus nothing, that you see the supernatural, all-encompassing, ever-present love of the Savior. That is what we experienced. Every day, we faced an insurmountable obstacle, and just as God provided for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, we are living proof that God provides.

When things like this happen, life changes. You take your relationship with the Lord more seriously and yourself less seriously. You enjoy the gift of this moment, and not worry so much about the next moment or the next day.

Three days ago, we watched and remembered as Jesus, God's only Son, willingly offered himself in our place as the sacrifice for sin—the thing that drags us all to our bottom places. Jesus looked into the faces of those who scorned and spat upon him with eyes of love and compassion and literally emptied himself for them. These were the people Jesus was literally dying to love.

But neither of these stories, Joseph's or Jesus', end at the bottom. Soon, Joseph rose to become the second most powerful man in Egypt. But for him, redemption was not found only in a new status in life; redemption took place when that dramatic rise brought about restoration of the brokenness in his family.

When a famine developed back home, Jacob send Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food where Joseph was in charge. A lot of years had passed since the brothers sold little Joseph into slavery. He was a new man and his brothers didn't recognize him. But Joseph knew who they were the moment he saw them.

After a while, Joseph finally took a long hard look into his brothers' eyes. Then he began to weep. He wept so loudly that the whole household of Pharaoh heard him. This was the sound of forgiveness, this was the sound of grace beginning to break in. As Jesus breathed his last, he too cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." I have given them all I can give, let your forgiveness flood in. And the response from the onlookers at Calvary to the brothers standing before Joseph was dismay and confusion: what is going on?

When mercy comes to us from unexpected places, when grace interrupts, it's confusing, it often leaves us speechless. In Mark's Gospel, it says that when Mary Magdalene and Mary brought spices to anoint Jesus, they found the tomb empty and a man robed in white sitting at the opening. When this angel told them what had happened, it says that they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone.

I like to think that astonishment and trembling is just the right response when we the realization of the depths from which we've been pulled. Coming face to face with the harsh realities of this world, only to meet the suffering servant, the wounded healer, instead ought to seize us with astonishment and trembling.

Hebrews 10:31 says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Joseph's brothers came face to face with their past and expected the worst. But what Easter morning tells us that fear

lasts but a moment because joy comes in the morning, boundless mercy, incomprehensible grace, indefinable hope, meets Joseph's brothers, it met the two Marys, and it meets us today.

In the days and weeks since our accident, there has been no small amount of tears shed, agony felt, and anxiety that has filled us. But even deeper and more profoundly than the worry is peace that God has given through the loving kindness of you, of Wabash, of our friends and family. Certainly, there is still a long way to go, but each moment that tempted us to despair has been filled with the good news of Easter—he is not here, he is risen! What you thought would be waiting for you, - judgment, death – is gone. He is not here, he is risen.

The first words my wife spoke to me from the ambulance were the words of Romans 8:1: **For there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** The life, the hurt, the choices, the baggage that once defined you, that you've been carrying with you, that is gone. When Jesus walked out of the tomb, he didn't even bother to bring the clothes he was buried in. Second Corinthians 5:17: **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

God is in the business of reworking our past, for his great future. In one of the most breathtaking moments in all the Bible, as Joseph's family stood before him, completely at his mercy, he proclaims one of the most powerful Easter messages in the entire Scripture.

Genesis 50:20 reads: **“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”**

This is the mystery of Scripture, it's the mystery of Holy Week. As a result of the brothers' actions, Joseph was sent to Egypt. As a result of our actions, Jesus went to the cross. As a result of being in Egypt, Joseph rose to his position in Pharaoh's government. As a result of the grave, Jesus could take away our sins and reveal his grace by rising again on the third day. The evil of the brothers got Joseph into the right place. And the evil of the people who crucified our Lord, brought about God's good plan of salvation. As Paul said, **“All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.”**

What is God's purpose for you and me? Nothing more than to mold us into people who live by God's great grace. And until our hearts begin to overflow with gratitude for that grace, we will never be free to stop judging, resenting, hurting, and carrying our crosses. So wherever it is that we find this freedom is precisely the right place to be, even if it's in the bottom places of life.

This week, grace found us in the bottom place. Not only in the form of the countless letters, phone calls, emails, and texts. But there were a few in particular who bravely came forward to say two of the most healing and hope-filled words we have ever heard: “Me, too.”

I've been where you are. I've seen what you've seen. The story's not over. What the enemy intended for harm, God is going to use for his great purposes. It will get better. Not because we will it to, not because we hope it to, not if you work hard enough. The story, our story gets better because Jesus loves us, because Jesus faced life's great enemy, death, and Jesus emerges victorious! Because of this, we can step into one another's lives and lead each other into the presence of Jesus the Christ, the wounded healer, our savior, our friend.

## Benediction

We still have a race to run. The author of Hebrews gives us shares that great hope for all we wounded, scared children. **Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.** And here, this one's for us. **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**