

## Genesis 45:3-15

“Your sins will find you out.” Scripture teaches this truth, in plain English, and also in the stories that are written down. Like this one in Genesis. The sin of Joseph’s brothers was like a boomerang. It took years to come back to them and find them, but when it did, its edges were lined with razor sharp teeth. We see the word “dismayed” in our text. But in Hebrew the word also means “terrified.” These brothers were not just startled and dismayed when Joseph revealed himself to them; they fell back in dread fear and terror.

You remember what they had done. They sold their brother into slavery. Not for the money, but out of hatred. They were jealous of him. Then they dipped his beautiful coat in blood and told their father that a wild animal had killed his favorite son.

Liars, murderers within their hearts. Now it’s revenge time. Or so they think. Joseph has the authority to pay them back many times over for their sin against him. But instead he forgives them. He kisses each one of them with the kiss of peace, and he weeps with tears of joy over them all.

Don’t you just love stories with happy endings like this one? They’re heart-warming. “Aw,” we say, “how touching and beautiful. It couldn’t have happened to nicer people.” No, wait. Joseph’s brothers were not nice people. They were horrible. You don’t even treat a stranger the way they treated their own flesh and blood.

That’s why this story is so heart-warming. It opposes the rules of humankind. It just isn’t natural. The natural thing would have been for Joseph to do exactly what his brothers were expecting him to do. Punishment, and not light but severe. Joseph’s heart should have been ruled by a grudge all this time. But it wasn’t. He shows kindness and love. He returns good for evil. What Joseph does is so unnatural it can only be explained by this: it is God whom we see in him. In fact, the entire story is nothing less than God at work in a most wonderful and merciful manner.

Do you have such heart-warming stories in your life? Stories of love and kindness shown; of forgiveness and reconciliation? Of course you do. For God also lives in you who are His baptized children. And He is at work in your life acting in the same merciful way.

Although we don’t make it easy for Him, do we? We act naturally. According to our sinful nature, that is. We act in the opposite manner in which Joseph acted. Instead of forgiving those who hurt us, we too often do what comes naturally: we get angry, we refuse to forgive, we hold a grudge.

I’m quite certain that all of us have been, at one time or another, in Joseph’s position. His brothers deliberately hurt him. Their sin against him was intentional. Maybe that’s happened to us, even with those who share our own flesh and blood. And it’s happened here, too, within our church family. Now and then we hurt each other. Hopefully not deliberately. But if so, then we are squarely in Joseph’s shoes, having the opportunity and privilege to return good for evil. God is at work here in us through His Word and Sacraments. If He wasn’t, we’d all hate each other.

We would refuse to support His church with our offerings. We would refuse to serve in His church. We wouldn't even come to worship. Or if we did, we'd come for the wrong reason.

Joseph clearly saw God at work. "It was God who did this," he told his brothers. God did not plan their sin, but He used it for His loving purposes. God caused Joseph to be thrown into prison in Egypt. God caused the famine. God used the famine to uplift Joseph and make him ruler in Egypt. God used the famine to bring his brothers to Egypt. And He used their grievous sin against Joseph to show mercy; to forgive these worthless brothers through the very man against whom they had sinned.

The devil uses sin, too. But he uses it to cause us to act naturally. Yet God's mercy is greater than our sin. Yes, our sin does find us. But so does the mercy of God. His mercy found Joseph's brothers. And His mercy finds you.

This entire story in Genesis is to point us to Christ. Jesus is the true "Joseph" against whom we have sinned, and even sinned deliberately. But He refuses to hold a grudge. He doesn't show mercy because you and I are such nice people. He is merciful to poor, miserable sinners. He loves the unlovable. He forgives the unforgivable. He forgives you.

Jacob saw his son's coat dipped in blood. But God saw the blood of His Son covering the cross upon which He died for you. And through that bloody cross He is reconciled to you. Here in His Sacrament He gives you the kiss of peace. All is well. You are forgiven.

This is God doing what comes naturally to Him. It is His nature to love; to love His enemies. It is His nature to forgive; to show mercy to those who do not deserve it. God loves to return good for evil.

And this is why your story is so heart-warming. It's why your life has a happy ending. Because you have a forgiving God who loves nothing more than to act in mercy toward you.

Now isn't this reason enough for us to forgive each other? for us to act in a way that is merciful? to do what comes unnaturally... but because Christ lives in us, you and I will be Joseph to our brothers and sisters; we will be Christ to our church family; we will see Christ in each other. And that truly is heart-warming. Amen.