

## Genesis 45:3-15

February 20, 2022

I have two questions for you. First, what is the worst thing that anyone ever did to you? Second, what is the best thing that anyone ever did to you?

The story of Joseph and his brothers teaches us that quite often the answer to both of these questions is one and the same. But we can only come to this understanding and wisdom by the power of the Holy Spirit as we fix our eyes on Jesus.

The worst thing that Joseph's brothers did to him was to sell him into slavery in Egypt. The best thing that Joseph's brothers did to him was to sell him into slavery in Egypt.

Now, when this happened long before, was Joseph thinking this was a good thing or a bad thing? The same thing we would have thought, and do think, when people do their worst to us. We see it as a bad thing.

And it was bad, very bad, for the brothers of Joseph to sell him into slavery. It was sinful through and through. It was intentional sin. They hated him, were jealous of him, and wished him dead. But for the sake of their father, they spared his life and sold him instead.

So, now they stand before Joseph, these brothers who had done their worst to him, and he reveals to them that he is Joseph, their brother whom they sold. And they are terrified it says in the Hebrew. For they expect him to do his worst to them. He has the authority. All of Egypt is in his power. He could, with just a word, do to them as they had done to him.

But the worst thing, which they are expecting, becomes the best thing. Joseph forgives them. Indeed, he had already forgiven them long ago. But now, in their presence, he becomes forgiveness to them, forgiveness they can see, and touch, and hear, as he weeps upon them, kisses them, and speaks tenderly to them.

It's not because Joseph was so good that he forgave his brothers. It's that his eyes were fixed, not upon the evil his brothers had done, but upon the goodness and mercy of God. Through the worst that his brothers had done, God brought about the best.

And you recall the story of how He did this. God had raised Joseph up from his dungeon cell to be Pharaoh's advisor. And first came seven years of abundance, and Joseph stored up grain in abundance. Then came seven years of famine. But with the grain that Joseph had stored up many lives were saved.

Now we might call those seven good years the best thing, and those seven bad years the worst thing. But God takes the worst and makes it the best. Those seven bad years became the best years. For that famine brought Joseph's brothers to him. And all the guilt they had been carrying around in themselves for years was finally taken away because of Joseph's forgiveness of them.

This is why the worst that was done to Jesus became, for us, the best. They hated Him, were jealous of Him, and wished Him dead. But God did not spare Jesus as He had spared Joseph. And the worst of all deaths and curses came to Jesus. He was crucified. The worst that man could do to God.

But God did His best through the worst. He forgave everyone. From the cross Jesus prayed, “*Father, forgive them,*” and He did. He forgave every sinner, also you. He took away your sin, your guilt, your punishment. It was all laid upon Jesus. The worst that could happen to Him. And for you, it is the best. Nothing could be better than the worst that Jesus suffered for you.

Now let me ask, where are the brothers of Joseph in your life? Are they where you work? Where you go to school? Are they in your own family? Who is it that has done their worst to you? How easy it is to be angry. How very natural it is to hold a grudge. But how very unlike God. If anyone had the right to hold a grudge, it was Jesus, even more than Joseph. But this is not God’s way. His way is to forgive.

And His way is to do His best through the worst. Joseph told his brothers that the famine had been in the land “*these two years.*” And also for us. For two years now we have experienced perhaps the worst years of our life. The worst that the world can do to us.

But God turns the worst into the best. As Joseph bid his brothers to come near to him, so God has brought you near to Him, and through these two years of famine. He has brought you to the awareness that you need Him, His strength, His mercy, His forgiveness.

And as Joseph gave his brothers forgiveness they could see, and touch, and hear, so God does the same for you. As Joseph wept upon his brothers, so Jesus’ tears of agony from the cross He sprinkled upon you in your baptism. As Joseph kissed his brothers, so Jesus gives you the bloody kiss of His own body and blood in His Sacrament. And as Joseph tenderly spoke the word of forgiveness to his brothers, so Jesus says to each one of you, “I forgive you.”

There were five more years of famine to come said Joseph to his brothers. Maybe for us too. But let the worst come, from whomever and whatever. Because your merciful and forgiving God always does His best through the worst. Amen.