

July 21

## The Beauty of Imperfection

Genesis 50: 15-22

Today we end our discussion of the messy family. We realize there are no perfect families. I am going to proclaim that this is a good thing! Yes, we live with broken promises, loss, thwarted expectations, sibling rivalries and more. But instead of being upset by all of this I want us to think about embracing the beauty of imperfection. Through these challenges we grow, we learn and hopefully it causes us to deepen our trust in God.

The life story of Joseph is a full account of messy family interactions, unexpected twists and turns in life, growing through the pain and coming at last to a place of understanding and maturity that you would not have thought possible. I want us to let his story help us to embrace the beauty of imperfection.

Joseph grew up a spoiled brat. He was his father's favorite. All of his brothers knew this. Dad gave him special clothes, didn't make him work as hard as his brothers and everyone knew he was going to inherit the lion's share of dad's estate even if he wasn't the oldest. Dad felt he was justified in treating him this way because he was the oldest son of the favorite wife. Joseph even tattled on his brothers, getting them into trouble. Joseph didn't seem to care what his brother's thought. He was living the good life and his future was well planned. Then, things change. His brothers grab him when they are alone in the fields, strip off his fancy coat, sell him to slavers and he ends up in Egypt.

All of us deal with the unexpected in life. How would you complete this phrase: Something in my life that I did not expect to happen was:\_\_\_\_\_. We all understand those moments of dislocation. Our plans dissolve, the new situation requires great changes in what we do, possibly where we live and more. For Joseph, he first became a slave in the house of a prominent official. Then, because he would not sleep with the wife of his owner, he is accused of rape and again finds himself in a new and unexpected place, in prison. Then, because he can interpret dreams, he finally becomes a trusted advisor to pharaoh. It is in this role that he encounters his brothers again. They are there to buy grain. Joseph initially plays on their fears and guilt before

he finally reveals himself and invites them, along with his father, to live in Egypt. They do this but after their father dies the brothers return to Joseph, afraid he will now enact revenge for what they had done. This final encounter between the brothers was our scripture today. Joseph, after many years of thinking, growing, and maturing, is a different man than the spoiled boy who was sold into slavery. I am sure that in the beginning he had plotted revenge. Later, in seeing his brothers he had had to work against those feelings. He probably struggled with concepts of forgiveness. But here we see the wisdom of maturity. He realized that although his life had taken many unexpected turns God was always with him. And those awful things that they had planned and carried out, they ultimately turned into a blessing for Joseph and for the brothers and many others.

Joseph came to understand that the best learning and most growth occur in those times when life is less than perfect. Why is this? I think it is because we learn to see the big picture of our lives. When looking at Joseph's story you could almost predict what happened. If you have one brother treated so differently from the others, it is going to cause jealousy which can lead to all sorts of things. Later in life I think Joseph had come to terms with his part to play in the events of their mutual lives. It doesn't excuse the brothers' actions, they were wrong but it allows Joseph to forgive them and move on.

Also, in those unexpected situations we let our guard down and this allows us to see God blessing us even in those times. God did not plan for the brothers to be mean to Joseph but God used the situation for greater good. When we are in unexpected places we often find and receive blessings that would not have happened in our lives otherwise.

Think about your life and some of its imperfect moments. You didn't plan for that broken promise, the loss that came way too soon, the job that evaporated, and so forth. Now that these moments are in the rear view mirror of your life can you see some positives that came out of those situations? Can you celebrate some of the learning that came from that stressful time? Can you see how this time stretched you and challenged you to grow in faith, in trust, and perhaps in love? Are you surprised at some of the new

beginnings that took place? All of this because life didn't happen perfectly as you had thought it might occur!

This is where Joseph had arrived. In looking back at all the twist and turns he did not focus on all that went wrong, the betrayal by his brothers, the false accusations by his master's wife or the forgetfulness of the other prisoners when they did not at first plead his innocence after their release. Instead he saw the bigger picture of how he had grown, how God had been at work in his life even when he didn't feel it, and the good that had happened. This is a celebration of how imperfections bring to us blessings.

In thinking about this I am reminded of a man I met. He had grown up on a farm in northeast Colorado. He did not see himself as a farmer. All through school he counted the years until he could graduate and go off to college and leave the farm. He was an only child and had let his father know that he was not planning to take over the farm. While this saddened his father, he understood that not everyone was cut out to be a farmer. He went off to college and while in his second year got a phone call from his mother. Dad had had a stroke and was in the hospital. He left the second semester early, taking incompletes in all of his classes, so he could go home. His was a cattle ranch and he knew in the spring there were calves to take care of and hay to put up and such. He fully intended to return in the fall. Dad was so grateful that he came home to help. Dad had a second stroke in the hospital, much worse and was partially paralyzed and would not recover enough to farm. He told his son they would sell out because he was not going to force him to be on the farm. The boy knew that the farm sale would not bring enough in for his parents to live on. He said, "I will drop out of college for a year or two to give us time to figure things out." The years went by. When I met him he had been back on the farm for almost 20 years. Dad had passed away and he was taking care of his mother who had her own health concerns. As I heard his story I looked for signs of bitterness or resentment. There were none. He had come to terms with the life he had instead of the life he wanted. He said, "I feel so blessed that I had the time I did with my father. I have also come to understand why he loved farming. I love it now as well." He focused on the blessings he had found not the things that had gone wrong.

Living in an imperfect world and family can be a blessing. We seem to, at these times, be more open to God. We are more willing to change and to accept life as it is given us instead of how we want it to be.

Joseph had come to understand that even though many things in his life were unexpected, harsh and unkind, God was with him and worked with him to transform him and those around him. Sometimes our best learning, most growth and most positive long-term experiences happen when the unexpected happen. Living in an imperfect world and family is ultimately a blessing.

So celebrate where you have journeyed in life. Some of it was unplanned. But God was with you. You have found blessings. And, this is a word to share with others as well when they are in a place they did not plan to be. Remind them God is with them and there are still blessings to be found.