

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota  
September 25, 2016

Genesis 37: 3-8, 17b-22, 26-34  
Genesis 50:15-21  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

### **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE**

Kids, I fell off my bike and skinned my knee quite a few times before I learned how to ride a two-wheeler. But, I was sure happy when I could finally ride that bike with no training wheels.

Sometimes when I was little, I would get into trouble with my parents and would get punished. But, then they would forgive me and everything would be okay again.

And I often grew out of my shoes. They got too tight and pinched my feet and I had to get a new pair.

This church once burned down, but then the people built a new one. And today we have a wonderful church to worship in and have Sunday school.

Pastor Melissa got a new pastor job and moved away. She was a great pastor and we really miss her. But, sooner or later, God will help us to find another person to come and take her place. God will bring another person to especially love and care about kids, teenagers and their families.

Kids, God can do wonderful things, even when bad things happen. God can bring about many good things, even when we run into trouble, pain or sadness.

So, kids, I encourage you to **always look for what good thing God might be working** to bring about next. When things go badly in your life or family, start looking right away, for how God can help to fix things, and even to make them better than they were before. God promises to help us, to keep us safe and to do good things in our lives and families. We need to trust God to be there for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Prayer:** God help these kids and their families to always turn to you when they need help. And God help them to always turn to you when things are going very well. God help them to know that you are always there for them, in good times or bad. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

Our Narrative Lectionary Text for today tells about **Joseph**. This is the Joseph that was featured in the play, “**Joseph and the Technicolor Dream Coat**.” Joseph’s story is a brilliant **roller coaster** of ups and downs for a young man that **desired nothing more than to please God**. From being his father’s favorite to being sold into slavery; from rising to the top of Egyptian Potiphar’s chain of command to being forgotten in a prison cell to rising once again to becoming Pharaoh’s right hand man, leader over all of Egypt. Joseph was born to be a leader, **rising from the pit to leadership** three times in his life. Throughout his life, people who were jealous or who felt slighted, or who were just plain selfish and/or forgetful seemed to stand in his way. But his persistence in faith and God’s persistence in faith kept Joseph returning to the top.

After all of the intrigue from Joseph’s hateful brothers, Joseph came to the place where he was able to **save the Egyptians** and **his own alienated family** from death by famine. And Joseph was able to save the **people God planned to move through** in order to save and bless every person in the world. Joseph’s brothers hated him, wanted to kill him, and finally sold him into slavery in Egypt. Years later, searching for food to save their family, they found themselves begging for Joseph to forgive them for the sake of their father, Israel/Jacob. Joseph forgave his brothers and saved them and their father and their families. After Joseph’s beloved father died, the brothers lied and said that he had asked that Joseph would still take care of them and not destroy them. And Joseph did continue to care for them.

There is a story about a pastor who planned a special picnic for some of the leaders of his church. He sent out invitations and looked forward to everyone coming. Then a few days later, he realized that he had forgotten to include one older lady. He called and apologized for the oversight and invited her to come. She responded, “**Oh, it’s too late Pastor. I already prayed for rain.**” God’s people can be so hard on each other. Joseph’s brothers were resentful of the leadership that he was giving to God’s chosen people. God’s people do not always get along that well together. I remember coming home from work one day in my first parish. I couldn’t tell my wife what had happened. All I could say was, “**Well Jennifer, I think the church did more harm than good today.**” Someone had said or

done something hurtful to someone else and now **another wound** had been inflicted upon the Body of Christ, God's faith family.

When Joseph forgave his brothers for all the wicked things they had done to him, he said, "**Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.**" The Apostle Paul tells us that "**God is at work in all things seeking to bring about good among those who love him.**" (Romans 8)

My dream was coming true. The factory worker's kid was getting a free ride to go to college and become a highly paid engineer. Try as I might, I flunked out of engineering. Disaster. Defeat. Mortification. Then God helped me to become a pastor and somehow is using me to work with people instead of with numbers. **God can bring good out of disaster.**

This congregation's church building burned down in the early 1950s. Disaster. Tragedy. But then a new, larger lot was obtained and a new building built in 1956, 60 years ago. Eventually this wonderful sanctuary was added on. In the 1950s, the Christian church in the United States, post WW II, was flourishing. Most everyone was attending worship services. A changing world and values has since focused people inward, toward self-centeredness and taking care of ourselves rather than trusting God and caring for the neighbor. As a result, thousands of churches have closed. When First Lutheran Church burned down, it could have been the end of this faith family. Instead, the members, with faith in God and faith in each other forged ahead. And this faith family, instead of focusing upon **survival** has focused upon **loving and caring for children, youth and families**, and upon **caring for the needs of the surrounding community.**

My home parish, now called **South Arrowhead Lutherans Together** (S.A.L.T.), has gone from five churches served by two or more ordained pastors to being served by one lay preacher. From what I can see, their focus is totally upon survival, keeping the doors open, rather than upon mission – how can we serve our communities? They'd rather have five empty sanctuaries than give up their buildings to form one strong church in mission. In the fifties, they would have had two or three hundred people in their combined sanctuaries. Now they have a few dozen.

In Joseph's story, God moves to rescue and give life even in the face of the most desperate situations. Joseph suffered greatly for his faith, but God rescued him. Joseph's brothers sinned badly, but Joseph and God forgave them. And God was able to move through all of it to restore their relationship and to continue to move through them to bring God's **forgiveness, love, hope and blessing** to our world, our day and to this very place.

Are there some hurtful things that have been said or done in this faith family, that we have been a part of? Have we forgiven the other people involved? Have they forgiven us? Has God forgiven them and us? Has God still been able to move through them and us to bring about **forgiveness, love, hope and blessing** in the world around us?

God brought **Adam and Eve**, people, into this world to live in a **love trust-relationship with God**, and to live in a **love-caring relationship with other people and the creation**. Adam and Eve didn't do a very good job. But, God didn't give up on them. God called **Abram and Sarai** to be the start of **God's loving-trusting people** who would bring God's blessing to the entire world. They did a little better. We are their modern day, faith descendents. This week we hear about God moving through **Joseph and his less than honorable brothers** to **save people from famine** and to **save people for God's family**. The **journey continues by the grace, mercy and love of God to this very day**.

God doesn't have any perfect people to use in God's work. God only has the likes of Adam, Eve, Abram, Sarai, Joseph, his brothers and you and me. You know our history. The church has killed **people who see the faith differently** than its leaders. The church has killed **scientists who share discoveries contrary** to long-held understandings. The church has **burned witches**. The church has **looked the other way** when thousands of **Africans were enslaved**, when thousands of **Native Americans were driven from their land**, when millions of **Jews were killed**, when millions of **refugees** were **driven from their homes** by civil war and tyrants in foreign lands. **Christians in our land stand bitterly divided** over what God's will is for our own day and struggles. What does Jesus have to say to how we vote? And **will God be able to still bring about forgiveness, love, hope and blessing** for this nation and world once the election is done?

What kind of a **faith roller coaster** have you been on? What sorts of ups and downs have you experienced in your own life? How has God been there when you have been on the **wrong side of God's will** for your life? How has God been there when you have sometimes been **faithful in following God**, but have paid some kind of a price for doing so? Can you, today, **see God somehow moving to continue to bring forgiveness, love, hope and blessing** to your life, your family, this faith family, our world?

Ancient Joseph, chosen to help carry God's salvation plan forward, put it this way, "**Do not be afraid! Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.**"

Attendance may be declining in American churches. People in the pews may be growing grayer. The world may be saying that a person has to be crazy to be Christian. But, our families here at First Lutheran are still **teaching their children to pray**. Our **teenagers are praying** for our cancer victims. Our **kids are teaching** Vacation Bible School. Our adults are serving as **adult mentors** to confirmation students. Our **middle school students** are willing to stand up in front of their peers and sing Christian songs, and the **peers are more and more starting to sing along**. Kids are **bringing their friends to confirmation**. Adults are bringing their **friends to worship**. People are **welcoming strangers**. This faith family is **opening its doors to welcome this community** into life together in Christ. And this faith family is more and more **going out** of these doors to bring **forgiveness, love, hope and blessing** to Aitkin and to the whole world.

Unfortunately, God chose to use human beings like us to love and save God's world. Looking out for number one is at the heart of our human brokenness. Our self-centeredness continues to rip individual and family lives apart. But God keeps moving to bring about the best good despite our human mistakes, failings and heartache. **Forgiveness, love, hope and blessing** – from God, for us and for our world. Thanks be to God. Amen.