

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Genesis 45:1-8a,15

Joseph, An Epiphany Role Model

- 1. His story from the book of Genesis**
- 2. Our lessons to remember from his life**

**Hymns: 85 – 493 – Distribution: 492, 315 –
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All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Genesis 45:1-8a,15 – ¹ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God... ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Where have all the good role models gone?
This is one thing we all lament at certain times.

Who are our children’s role models today?
Often they can be:

- TV actors and singers who talk and dress in ways that are not to be emulated
- Sports heroes who exhibit unchristian attitudes and make poor decisions in their personal lives
- Violent video game heroes
- And other distressing ones too, I’m sure

It leaves us asking, “Where have all the good role models gone?”

Today we are going to be pleased and joyful to see a role model in our sermon text. And he is not simply one for our children. He is a role model for us all. It is none other than the Old Testament believer Joseph. As we learn about the account of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 45 this morning, may God move us to pattern ourselves after his godly example!

1. His story from the book of Genesis

To understand the lessons we should learn from this Old Testament reading, we must understand the larger context in which this account happened. Therefore, we need to back up a bit in time to see what exactly had happened between Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph came from a dysfunctional home, if there ever was one. For one thing, the family was made up of twelve different brothers from four different women. But the father only really loved one of those women, and that was Joseph’s mother. She was now dead, having died giving birth to Joseph’s only full sibling, his younger brother Benjamin.

So, being that Joseph was the son of the favorite wife who was now gone, Joseph was the favorite child. We hear in Genesis 37, “(Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.”

Conflict increased as time went on, and it was partly due to Joseph's fault. The Lord revealed some dreams to Joseph: *"Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.' His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said."*

Sometime later we see more conflict. Jacob has sent all the boys out to work tending the flocks, but had kept Joseph back with him. Then it says in Genesis 37, *"(Jacob) said to Joseph, 'As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them. Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.' "* Joseph had already brought his father a "bad report" about them earlier in the chapter, and now he goes to check up on them and bring another report.

The brothers have had enough. They plot evil things as they see him coming: *"When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of... the richly ornamented robe he was wearing and they took him and threw him into (a) cistern... As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead... Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt... Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, 'We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe'... Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many*

days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.' So his father wept for him."

Perhaps you have experienced abuse of some form in your family or upbringing. Joseph's family is no exception to that!

To move the story along, God's hand was with Joseph in Egypt. He was framed by an evil woman for assaulting her, but survived a prison stay and was released when God revealed to him the interpretation of a troubling dream that Pharaoh had. The world would undergo seven years of good crops and then seven years of a horrible famine. Pharaoh was so impressed by this young 30-year old that he made him the head of food storage and distribution in Egypt, putting him second in command of the country!

And then his brothers, twenty years after selling him into slavery and presuming him to be long abused and dead, appear on the scene in Egypt, looking to buy grain because the famine is so bad in Palestine. They do not recognize their grown brother. Joseph is very harsh with them to test them, to see if they have changed. Eventually, he demands that their youngest brother Benjamin must stay with him in Egypt. Then in a very telling moment, brother Judah – who was the one who came up with the idea to sell Joseph in the first place – gives a moving speech to beg for Benjamin to be allowed to go home, because it would kill their father to lose him. At the end of chapter 44, Judah offers to stay himself as a slave in place of the youngest brother. And so Joseph knows... they have changed! The time has come for an "epiphany." The time has come to reveal himself to them.

Then come the words of our reading: *"Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!'... And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still living?' But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence."*

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!' ”

2. Our lessons from his life

That brings us to the point where we can learn from this role model who had also changed over the course of those twenty years. What lessons can we take away from this account of Joseph? I'd submit that we can learn three lessons today.

The first lesson might surprise you. It's a lesson that some of you do not really need to hear, but it's a lesson that others of you certainly need to hear. We see it in Joseph's next words: *"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."* Do not be "distressed," literally alarmed, terrified, and disturbed, because of your sin. Do not be angry with yourselves, having seen the effects on their father and realizing the fallout that had happened in the past years.

We also see this lesson in what they said to each other in chapter 42 when Joseph, the mean Egyptian, had been chewing them out and testing them: *"They said to one another, 'Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us.' Reuben replied, 'Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.'* ”

We see this same lesson long after this account is over in Genesis 50, when Jacob finally dies. Even at that time we hear, *"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?' So they sent word to Joseph, saying, 'Your father left these instructions before he died: "This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly"... His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. 'We are*

your slaves,' they said." Do you see some lingering guilt remaining? Joseph, our role model, told them that they needed to learn to forgive themselves.

Are there people here today who need to hear that?

- There are husbands here who might. After all, your failures may weigh on you heavily. It may be in the way that you have let your wife down so many times because of your forgetfulness or selfishness.
- You may have guilt that weighs on you heavily because you haven't been there for your children as much as you should have been. Work seemed more important and pressures on you may have caused it, but it wasn't right and you have failed.
- Parents here today might feel guilt weighing on them. Perhaps you lose your patience too quickly and you always seem to be harshly reacting to your children's mistakes or simply their youth.
- Everyone here today has some weakness of sin that torments them – An addiction, a pet sin, a unique weakness that the devil exploits and tempts you toward.

There are people in this room that remember all these things and the guilt lies heavy upon you at night. You cannot seem to let it go.

"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves," for you have a Savior from the line of Jacob who has come for you. You have an Epiphany King who came to bear the guilt of your sin as he suffered and died on the cross in your place. **He paid the price of your guilt and you need to let it go.**

We learn a second lesson from our role model today. We see it in how he reacted toward his brothers as he revealed himself. I'd submit that all people here need to learn this lesson. After all, the words "I am Joseph" really could have filled those grown brothers with fear. Terror of terrors, their long lost brother

that they hated and wanted to kill was now standing in front of them in Egyptian garb as the second most powerful man in the world.

"I am Joseph!" The helpless, wimpy teenager they had sold into slavery now stood over them with their lives in his hands. What would he do to them? What would he say next?

- "I am Joseph, and now I will get my revenge!"
- "I am Joseph, and now I will put you into a cold, dark pit so that you can know firsthand what it means to beg and scream for your life!"
- "I am Joseph, and now I will sell you as slaves across the continent where you will die in hard labor and agony!"
- "I am Joseph, and I will send you away alone where you will lose the hope of seeing your family again!"

What would the verdict be? *"Come close to me... I am your brother Joseph... Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him."* What a conversation that must have been! **We see a brother who has forgiven them. What a lesson this is for us!**

It's interesting what parents must teach their children. Many of the same things must be emphasized by us all:

- "Don't talk to strangers"
- "Put your coat on – It's winter"
- "Take a shower – You're dirty"

Isn't it interesting that when it comes to interaction with the other children in the family, the same concept needs to be repeated often:

- "Tell them you're sorry"
- "Don't retaliate in revenge"
- "You need to accept their apology"
- "Shake hands"

Nobody knows those lessons naturally. But it's not just children who need to learn to forgive, is it? Whom are you withholding forgiveness from?

- Your spouse?

- An in-law?
- A grown brother?
- Someone at work?
- A classmate?
- A fellow church member?

Saying we should forgive others seems so easy in theory, but when a concrete situation arises that requires forgiveness how quickly we can be in shutting down charitable communication. How tempted we are to withhold love, to punish the guilty party, or to take an "extension" on anger for a time before offering forgiveness.

At times like this we must remember how God treated us when we were his enemies. He sent his Son to complete our salvation and earn our forgiveness. He has forgiven us fully and freely. We must remember this grace, and also the fact that our Savior has taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

A final lesson remains. We learn a lesson in the words of Joseph as he reflected on the past twenty years. *"It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."*

There may have been a time when Joseph wondered, "Why me? Why this, Lord?" But those days were long gone. Joseph recognized the hand of God in control of the whole situation. He saw the mysterious working of the Lord in a couple different ways. First of all, he saw how God was bringing about the preservation of physical life in his being sold to Egypt by his brothers. God brought about his rise to power for the good of the world at that time of famine, so grain would be available for starving people.

Yet look deeper into his words and see something more. Joseph mentions that God did this to provide for their family a remnant, and to bring about a great deliverance. The Hebrew literally says God did this to "appoint" a

remnant for the Jewish nation. What is he referring to? God's nation of Israel had to survive, even though it might be a "remnant." God had promised a Savior through the Jewish nation, as he had promised to Abraham. And Joseph was talking to Abraham's offspring in front of him! The line of the Savior through Abraham's descendants had to be preserved so that Jesus Christ our Savior could come into the world as promised and work out our salvation through his life, suffering, and death. This explains why Joseph would suggest the migration of the clan, which numbered about 70 at this time, to Egypt. Joseph expressed his faith later in these promises of God in Hebrews 11: *"By faith Joseph, when the end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."* (Namely, to bury him in the Promised Land instead of Egypt)

Do you see what our third lesson is? How do we accept the effects of those who have done wrong to us? How do we view our trials? What attitude do we have toward God? Our attitude is the same as our role model Joseph. We accept the fact that God is working through them. We accept the fact that God still is in control of all situations. We take to heart the verse in Romans 8 that you might well know: *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* We rejoice, remembering God's words in Jeremiah 29: *"I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* Even when the outcome of and reason for those plans remain hidden from us, we realize and accept that God's mysterious ways are a blessing.

Finally, a role model we can be thrilled at! A role model in our day and age that we can follow, and encourage our young people to follow also. May we not forget these lessons anytime soon. **May Joseph teach us to:**

- 1. Learn to forgive ourselves**
- 2. Learn to forgive others**

3. Learn to trust in God's mysterious ways

May God bless us as we strive to do these things. And may God use us as an Epiphany reflection of the love of Christ as we do, so we can be a godly role model to others! Amen.