

Church in the Wild Devotional
Sunday, April 21, 2018

Joseph's SAGA inspires us to look for signs of God's providential care when our lives become sagas. Last Sunday we discovered the Bible's startling claim that God's purposes would be accomplished through Joseph's dysfunctional family. His father was named Jacob, which means "grabs you by your heel." With his mother's help, Jacob tripped up family members, deceiving his aged father so he could steal his older brother's blessing. Though he and Esau eventually reconciled, Jacob never stopped manipulating others. He infected the next generation with a legacy of conflict when Jacob "loved Joseph more than any of his sons" and gave him "a richly ornamental robe" that exempted Joseph from manual labor.

This highly dysfunctional family distorted Joseph's outlook. His brokenness was evident as he savored Jacob's preferential treatment. In the midst of this tense situation, God gave Joseph a dream that foretold of his brothers—even his father—bowing down to him. This dream would be so disruptive of family harmony that we might wonder how it could possibly come from God.

Read the next episode of the saga now: Genesis 37:12-36.

Even though we know this story, it's stunning to read that evil could possess ten jealous men to conspire to kill their younger brother. Reuben tried to save Joseph by casting him into a pit, but Judah's suggestion to sell him to traveling Midianites preempted the rescue. After being deceived with a goat-blood-spattered robe, Jacob wailed for his son, unaware of his guilt.

So where is God in this awful story? Up till now God seems uncaring, almost capricious. The Almighty not only allowed family dysfunction, God inflicted Joseph with a presumptive dream, knowing full well that when he bragged, the family would explode in violence.

God's way are mysterious, yet careful attention to the saga allows us to trace the Lord's hand. God prompted Reuben to thwart Joseph's murder, setting the stage for gracious alternative. God sent the Midianites, which provided Judah the opportunity to sell Joseph to travelers headed to Egypt, the pre-eminent empire of that time. Finally, verse 36 told us that of all the options, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, "one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard."

So far none of these details has great significance. But each turn of the plot will become an indispensable component in the story's glorious outcome. The joyful conclusion was foreshadowed by God's disruptive dream. God makes good out of bad!

What about your life? Christ-followers are not spared life's ugliness. We too must deal with disappointment, whether in the past, the present, or the future. Does your saga include tragic loss, betrayal, addiction, divorce, rivalry, prejudice, injustice, falsehoods, or horrible conflict? Were there family members who failed to face their pain in a healthy manner, leaving you a legacy of dysfunction?

Remember the assurance provided by Paul in Romans 8:28: "In all things" (even the worst things), God always "works for good"... to heal, save, and redeem. Also, our lives are part of God's larger plan. As Paul wrote, we have been "called according to His purpose." The trials we endure are woven into the fabric of God's plans to bless other people.

For today, it's enough to remember that when people or circumstances strip our dignity and cast us down, God is present, hearing our raw prayers, working for our good. The Psalmist's words can somehow resonate for us: "Praise the Lord," He "redeems your life from the pit" (103:4).

Questions to Ponder or Discuss:

- What was most interesting about today's part of Joseph's saga?
- What did Joseph learn in the pit?
- Can you recall ways that God was at work in your life when you were cast into a "pit"?