

## **It's not just about you**

Genesis 45:1-15

August 17, 2008

I am sorry to have to tell you this, but it's not just about you!

Maybe you have come here -- to this church, or to any church -- looking for comfort, looking for reassurance, looking for support. Maybe you've come looking for a source of strength or courage or wisdom ... or forgiveness.

Maybe you've come looking for fellowship, for companionship, for a sense of community, for a sense of family. for something to belong to, for something to belong to that makes you feel valued and appreciated. Maybe you've come looking for a fuller, richer, more meaningful kind of life.

In any case, it's good that you've come here, because you will find all of those things here. You will find all of those things wherever the Spirit of Jesus is present and welcomed. But it's not just about you!

It's not just about coming to a place where your needs are addressed. It's about coming to a place where you are changed, fundamentally changed. It's about being transformed -- in mind and in heart, in plans and in priorities.

It's not about bringing God into your life, about getting God on your side, but it's about getting you on God's side, about venturing outside the boundaries of your own personal concerns to go to a new place you've never been before. God has bigger ideas, bigger plans. God's plan includes you, but it's not just about you. And Joseph understood that.

You remember the story of Joseph and his brothers? Joseph was the eleventh of the twelve sons of Jacob, one of only two born to his beloved wife, Rachel. Joseph's father, Jacob, was the brother of Esau and the son of Isaac who was the son of Abraham.

Because Joseph was Rachel's child and because he was a child born to his father in his old age, Joseph was a favorite to Jacob. Jacob paid Joseph more attention than his brothers and gave him a special robe. Joseph's brothers grew jealous and resentful of him and Joseph did nothing to help their feelings when he shared with them a dream he had of all of the rest of the family bowing in homage to him! His brothers were so jealous and so resentful that when the opportunity presented itself, they seized him and tore off his robe and sold him as a slave, and then cruelly told their father that Joseph had been gored by a wild animal.

Joseph ended up in Egypt, where after a series of adventures and misadventures, his skills in dream interpretation and civil administration, and the grace of God, led to his appointment as vice-regent of all Egypt, a Hebrew slave given authority second only to the king! Joseph put his political power to good use, helping Egypt and all its region of influence prepare for an impending famine of great severity and duration.

It was during that famine that the sons of Jacob, Joseph's brothers, came from Canaan to Egypt seeking to buy food. A long story of deception and intrigue ensued, as Joseph played his brothers and made them squirm. You see, he recognized them, but they did not recognize him! When Joseph did finally reveal himself to his brothers, he sobbed loudly and uncontrollably, and his brothers were frozen into a terrified silence.

It's easy to understand why the brothers were terrified. They knew their crime and they could only imagine what their empowered victim might do now to them. But why did Joseph sob? His feelings, I think, are much more complex.

His tears could be a release -- a release of grief, suffered in private for so long, a release of pent-up anger and resentment.

Or his tears could be tears of joy -- joy at the news his father was still alive, joy at this reunion with his family after so many years, reunion with his younger brother Benjamin and even with the brothers who had wronged him.

Or his tears could reflect his awed and humbled and deeply grateful awareness of the goodness of God that brought him to that place and time and brought his brothers to him, allowing him to welcome them and serve them in their time of need.

You see, Joseph understood it wasn't just about him. It wasn't just about his injury, his loss, his hunger for vengeance. "Do not be upset or blame yourselves," he told his brothers. "It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people's lives."

To save people's lives! It's not just about Joseph, not just about Jacob's family, not just about the future nation of Israel. It's about saving people -- all the people!

Joseph could see something of that broader purpose of God, something of God's bigger plan -- to preserve life and to bless, not just one person or one people, but all the people and nations of the world. And Joseph understood that what happened to him served God's broader purpose, that God was able to bring good out of evil, certainly for him personally, but also and especially for the wider circle of humanity that is dear too to God.

Joseph was able to step back from the limited perspective of his own troubles and blessings to see something of the purpose and plan of God in the broad sweep of history. Can you?

Can you see that it's not just about you?

Joseph's story is a remarkable one. It's a powerful human story of jealousy and bitterness, betrayal and cruelty, forgiveness and forbearance and reconciliation. But more than that, it is remembered and recorded in the sacred writings as a story of God's providence, the story of a God who takes care of his people generation after generation after generation, through the ups and downs and the triumphs and the tragedies of their history. And the story is only getting started! The land of Egypt which saved Jacob's family from starvation would soon become their prison, but God would hear their anguished cries and would act to set them free to become his own chosen people.

But the story is even more still! This God who calls a people to be his own and faithfully takes care of them generation after generation even in the face of their stubbornness and infidelity, does so not only for their sake, but for the sake of a much bigger purpose, a much bigger plan. Paul expressed it this way: "God's plan is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head."

All creation! Everything! Everyone! It boggles the mind -- and the heart -- why God would want to bring everything together and how God can possibly accomplish such a plan.

But that is God's plan and God invites you to be a part of it. God will provide you what you need: a second chance, a fresh start, strength and courage in the hard times, wisdom in the confusing times, help in the helpless times, comfort in the lonely times.

But it's not just about you. It's not just about saving you. It's about saving the world, saving all creation: reconciling enemies, bringing fullness of life and prosperity not just to some people but to all, healing the rifts among people and between people and the earth, making us good stewards of all we have and all we are, filling our lives with blessing and joy.

It's about joy. Weren't Joseph's tears tears of joy? He was hurt, but he was not bitter. He was wronged, but he did not require payback. Because he knew it wasn't just about him!

It's when we think it's all about us that we grow defensive and bitter and hateful and despondent about all the ills done to us in this life.

But when we understand it's not just about us, when we understand something of God's larger purpose, something of God's bigger plan, and when we realize that God wants us -- wants you! -- to play a most important role in bringing that plan, that dream, that kingdom, into being ... that is joy! What a privilege, what an honor, to know that the simple circumstances of our lives, the humble actions we take, can serve God's bigger purpose.

That's why we come here -- not just to invite Christ into our lives to save us, but to hear Christ's invitation to join ourselves to him and let ourselves be used by him as he fulfills God's plan to bring all creation together.