

Living Meekly

Bible Reading:
Genesis 45: 1-15
1 Corinthians 15: 35-58
Luke 6: 27-38

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Friends,

Can you see the hand of God at work in your life?
Can you see Him directing, caring, protecting, controlling?

I wonder if Joseph, the son of Israel, could see it.

Read with me, if you would, from the Word of God -

GENESIS 45: 1-15

What a life of upheaval that man lived through.
Constant conflict with his jealous brothers,
Kidnapped by them and sold as a slave.
Thrown into jail by his Egyptian master on false charges
Eventually released into the service of Pharaoh,
And there his brothers stumble upon him, seeking food for their family.

Some would call this whole thing a highly unusual series "coincidences".
Well, in our passage Joseph reveals what he thinks about all those so-called coincidences.

Ge 45:5,7

*And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life....
...God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.*

Joseph looks back on his tough past, and sees God's footprints in the sand of his life.
It could have been **way** different. Joseph could easily have been a very bitter person. When a body gets knocked around, pushed to the margins, ignored, treated unfairly -
- well, those things can pile up.

I think, quite honestly, that I could have turned bitter at any single **one** of these things he experienced.
Bitter against family.
Bitter against the system.
Bitter against God.

Something in Joseph fights that, though.
Something inside Joseph stares through the storms swirling around him,
and sees the hand of God at work.

And as he sees it, he is able to endure.
Not that he understands it, fully.
But he **does** know that His life is not out of control.
He is able to reach out in genuine reconciliation with his brothers because he sees and is able to say,
"You may have sold me, but really what was happening was that God sent me...."

The beatings, the shackles, the loneliness, the poverty, the quick rise to power —
— **none** of this **just** happened.

God took, twisted, guided, moved those events with divine purpose.
God worked His precise and perfect will through very ordinary and very imperfect human beings.
And, oh my goodness, are Joseph and the boys ever an imperfect bunch!

Interesting thing - Joseph is overcome with the emotion of the moment of reunion. He breaks down. Throws his arms around Benjamin and weeps. Benjamin returns the sentiment.

Then notice v.15: Joseph kisses his brothers and weeps over them. But there is deathly silence about the response of his brothers.

Not a whisper.

Were they stunned? Frightened? Guilty? Ticked off that he was still alive?

We don't know.

What we **DO** know is that Benjamin is the **only** one who wept at seeing Joseph alive.

They're a tough lot, those boys.

You see that by v.24 - as they get ready to head back to Canaan, Joseph says to them, "*Do not quarrel along the way.*"

He must have seen something brewing.

And don't go signing Joseph up for sainthood. He had done his share of insensitive and dumb things along the way. Even in this chapter. He sends the boys packing to get their dad. And, have a look at v.22: He **still** plays the favorite and gives Benjamin more than the other boys get. **That** is exactly the sort of thing that got him into trouble with them in the first place.

He may have been the wise ruler of Egypt.

But in some ways he remains incredibly **dumb!**

Can you see?

Sovereign God works His precise and perfect will through very ordinary, imperfect people.

If as believers we can see that, it makes a **huge** difference as to how we approach our lives.

It'll mean that we don't have to be so controlling.

We don't have to be so uptight about ensuring that we get the final word,
or have the planning ducks all lined up in a row,
or be a part of everything that's going on.

We can -

- sometimes -

just let it go.

May I be so bold, and perhaps brash -

as to suggest that this whole control thing goes pretty deep into our Christian Reformed culture. A lot of the conflict and the hurt and the challenges and the roadblocks that I have witnessed or been part of have had **control** as one of the primary driving forces.

For a whole bunch of reasons.

Our forebearers lived through the Depression, and then the War, and then the immigration and an often tough beginning here.

All that led to lots of uncertainty, anxiety.

And one of the ways that people deal with uncertainty and anxiety is through trying to grab **control** of the situation.

In the midst of Joseph's trauma, abuse and pain

the stuff that was his own fault,

and the stuff that was very unfairly dumped on him

In the midst of all that Joseph can see the hand of God at work.

It's what keeps his equilibrium.

So, for us too -
When we see the hand of God at work, we can let go of the control.
We can hold on to life much more loosely.
Trusting everything into the hands of our Father in Heaven.

Like we said at the beginning of the service - from Psalm 37:
We will commit everything we do to the LORD.
We trust him, knowing that He will help us.

Committing our life into the powerful, sovereign hands of the Lord.
What a **huge** difference that makes!

Go with me to the gospels.
Let's read from

Luke 6: 27- 36

Here is one of **the** singularly most **difficult** teachings of Jesus.
Not that it's impossible.
For we see it lived to absolute perfection in the life of Jesus Himself.
As He lays down His pure and perfect life for sinners.
He allows men of wicked intent to betray Him, beat Him, literally rob him naked, kill Him.
And **never** does He fight back.

Why can Jesus live like this?
And why can He call on His followers to do the same?
to: bless those who curse you;
 allow them to strike not only one cheek, but two;
 take not only your outer coat, but your sweater, too;
 lend without the expectation of being repaid...

Why?
Well, because Jesus sees through the storms and turmoil,
 through the sometimes very painful and unjust and unfair times of life,
 and he sees the powerful hand of His Father at work.

In Matthew 26 we read of the arrest of Jesus. It says:
Suddenly, one of those with Jesus drew [his sword], and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.
52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back...."
53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?
54 But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

Can you hear that?
Jesus is descending into the valley of the shadow of death.
But, as the 23rd Psalm says, he fears no evil in that valley
for.....

remember the words?

Thou
Art
With
Me.

Jesus knows that His time is not left to chance.
It has been prophesied and planned.
It will be carried out fully under the direction of His Father in Heaven.

Now,
as it is for the Master,
so it is to be for His followers.

Brothers and sisters,
we who have surrendered our lives to Jesus are called through the Gospel to literally follow in His footsteps.

We can do so, having surrendered our lives to Jesus and knowing with
absolute
confidence
that our lives are in good, strong hands.

We don't have to worry about being in control
or even giving the appearance of having things in control.

For the Divine One who is our Father, for Jesus' sake,
HE has the control.
HE has the last word.
Every bit as much as He had the last word in the sometimes very strange and sometimes dumb
and very, very human life of Joseph
He has the last word in the events of our lives!

He has the last word in our lives.
And He has the last word in the direction of all history.

Flip forward in the Bible with me. You may remember what I have said in previous weeks, that the Word of God often gives us the seed of truth in the Old Testament; and that seed flowers in the Gospels and the life of Jesus; and finally, commentary and fruit is borne in the Epistles.

That is very true in this case.
Let us attend to the wisdom of God -

1 Corinthians 15: 50-58

All the events, all the challenges, all the pains, all the defeats-
the stuff that makes us want to clench our fists and grab a tight hold of the little that we **do** have in this short life;
...to grab control

ALL of that fades away at the trumpet call;
When the One who *holds* the final word *speaks* it.

Then the perishable is exchanged for the imperishable.
Death, then, is swallowed up in the victory that Jesus won on the cross.
At that point there will be no more injustice
no more pain
no more dumb moves on our part
no more death.
The mortal will be swallowed up by immortality.

**Don't
ever
forget
that!!!**

Brothers and sisters,
You may think that Joseph's life was pretty cool in that he saw visions and dreams come true, and miracles and all kinds of direct work of God in his life.
Well, Joseph **never** had the privilege that you and I have -
Of seeing the true scope of the power of God's hand
and how that hand reaches right through to the final moment of history.

What a blessing!
What encouragement!
And what relief!

Which is why we get the final verse of 1 Corinthians 15:

*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you **KNOW**.....*

what do we know????

***that in the Lord
your labor
is not in vain.***

Our lives aren't wasted.
Our efforts aren't futile.
Our time is not meaningless.

Provided

Did you catch the provision???
We are in the Lord.

Provided:

Our lives surrendered to Jesus.
Our wills submitted to His.
We pry our little fingers off the steering wheel of life and let Him have

- here's that word -
the **control**.

Trusting that His power is sure.
And His promise is good.
And His covenant care is certain.

Friends,

Can you see the hand of God at work in your life?
Can you see Him directing, caring, protecting, controlling?

Looking back we can often see it;

Through faith, and with wisdom and attentive reflection, we can understand some of the divine moves in our life.

It is hard to do that looking forward.

And I don't believe that we are called to do that - to figure out what God's net move is going to be.

The real challenge is to be open and receptive to whatever the Lord is planning and working **right now**.
Living in such a way that we can, with integrity, act out the injunction of Christ in Luke 6 — living with an open hand; with a loose grip on the controls of life.

The challenge is to see and understand that God's great hand has the control
right now

In our lives
In our families
In His Church here at Calvin.

That's a challenge in the swirl and storm that so often is life.

A real challenge.

Can you see it?

Can you see the hand of God at work?

Can you see it when a job offer came where none was expected?

Where you had inner strength of heart when you were feeling beaten with grief?

Can you see the hand of God bringing the right person into your life at the right moment with the right skill set or precisely the right word?

Can you see it in circumstances that end up pushing you in a certain direction?

Can you see the hand of God at work?

Watch for it.

Because it **is** possible to miss it.

I doubt that Joseph's brothers saw it. As they report the events to their father, some time later, the name of the Lord is never mentioned.

They didn't see it.

Joseph did and gave God the credit.

Brothers and sisters -

I believe that all of us here desire for this congregation of Calvin CRC to be a thriving, growing, fruitful community of Christians.

Understand, with me, that -

The life and blessing and success of this congregation is not, ultimately, dependent on great programming – through we've got good stuff going.

And it doesn't depend on great worship – through I believe God is pleased with the liturgical offering we present Him each week.

It doesn't depend on a solid building, or slick advertising.

Can we let go and surrender this congregation into the direction and purpose that God has in store? Instead of gripping tightly, can we open our hands before the Lord in a posture of prayer - can we do that?

Can we keep our eyes open and our hearts sensitive
to people that the Lord may bring into our community?
to circumstances that He directs our way?
to thoughts that He plants in our minds, and confirms via others?
to impulses of the intuition and heart that we can't shake?
to dreams that are vivid and stay with us?

Can we do that in our family life?

Can we do that in our own lives?

Dear friends, and fellow servants of Jesus -

Can you see the hand of God at work in your life?

Can you see Him directing, caring, protecting, controlling?