

**“FROM PIT TO PARDON:
A REDEMPTION STORY”**

Text: Gen 45:3-15; Lk 6:27-38; 1 Cor 15:21-26, 30-42

The story of Joseph is a story filled with highs and lows, triumphs and defeats. Joseph's own brothers harbored a deep, bitter hatred for him. It wasn't just a fleeting dislike; they actively plotted his demise. Imagine the betrayal, the pain of knowing your own family wishes you dead!

But they instead, they ripped his beautiful, multi-colored coat from his back and sold him into slavery. Sold him! To a foreign land, to a life of servitude, far from his family and everything he knew. Can you picture the fear, the loneliness, the utter desolation he must have felt?

Even in slavery, Joseph's character shone through. He worked conscientiously, earning the trust of his master. But even that hard-won respect was taken away. Falsely accused of a crime he didn't commit; he was thrown into prison. Abandoned and forgotten by those he had helped, betrayed by those he thought were his friends.

The days must have felt unbearably heavy. But the story doesn't end there. It takes a dramatic turn. One day, Joseph is elevated to a position of great power. He's put in charge of all the food supply in Egypt! Imagine that! From slave to prisoner to the second most powerful man in Egypt!

And then, the moment of reckoning arrives. Those who hated him, who cursed him, who abused him, who struck him, who stole from him, who wished him dead, who sold him into slavery – those very same people stand before him, with hat in their hands. Not just standing there, but on their knees, begging for food, begging for mercy.

We know how Joseph responded. We heard it again today in our Old Testament reading. He revealed himself to them. He could have sought revenge. He had every right to. But not Joseph!

Joseph loved his brothers. Even though they treated him like an enemy, he didn't see them as his enemies. He responded to their hatred with love. ***He did good to those who had wronged him. He blessed those who had cursed him, both in word and in deed.*** They'd stripped him of his coat, his identity, his family. And in return... He clothed them. He fed them. He provided for them. He gave them far more than they had ever taken from him.

And he asked for nothing in return! The Golden Rule on steroids! Think about that. He extended the very same mercy he himself had longed for all those years. The mercy he wished they had shown him; is the mercy he freely gave back. He broke the cycle of hatred with an outpouring of love and forgiveness.

Some people say time heals all wounds. But Joseph's story tells us something greater. It wasn't just time that healed him; it was God. Perhaps it's better to say, "**God heals all wounds.**" It was the Word of God, the very presence of God, that was with Joseph, working in Joseph, all those years. That same Word of God sustained him through every struggle, every high and every low, through all the good days and, especially, through all the bad days. It was God's presence, God's promise, that carried him through.

Could you be like Joseph? Could I be like Joseph? Maybe. Maybe not. Perhaps we are sometimes, and sometimes we fall short. It's a challenge for sure! How many of us have said, or at least thought, "I could never forgive that"? "I could never love him after what he did." "I could never do good to her after the pain she caused." The hurt feels too deep, the wounds too raw, the betrayal too profound. And that's understandable. We think, "The mercy I longed for, the mercy I so desperately needed but didn't receive... how can I possibly give it away now?" It feels impossible.

I would guess that Joseph himself wrestled with those same feelings. Perhaps he had days, maybe even years, when the bitterness and the pain threatened to consume him. Perhaps, he, too, was surprised—even more surprised than his brothers—when he saw them again, not with hatred in his heart, not with a thirst for revenge, but with love. How could he possibly love them after all they'd done?

We know. Because just as these truths are evident in Joseph's relationship with his brothers, they're even more profoundly true of Jesus and his relationship with us! His forgiveness, His mercy, His boundless love, His immeasurable goodness poured out for you and for me... it's a love that surpasses all understanding.

When you look at your own life, whom do you see yourself more clearly reflected in: Joseph, or his brothers? I know, sadly, what the answer is for me. I know how much I need forgiveness for the times I've mistreated others. How much mercy I need for the careless and reckless things I've done. How much love I have failed to show. And yet... I also know the incredible generosity of those who have extended forgiveness, love, and mercy to me—and some of you in these very pews! What's the source of that forgiveness, love, and mercy? I know, though. I know how Jesus is caring for me, ministering to me, through those I've offended.

When Jesus tells us, as we heard in the Gospel, to "**be merciful, even as your Father is merciful,**" it's more than just a command. It's a promise. Think about it: the mercy you need, you will receive. And you receive it so that you can then extend that same mercy to others who need it. It flows from you, yes, but really... it flows from God through you.

Because Jesus never asks us to do something without first equipping us to do it. He never commands us without also giving us the very things we need to obey. He works within us through the Gospel, enabling us, so that we can be vessels of His mercy to others.

So, we come, like Joseph's brothers, not to a powerful man in Egypt, but to the One who sits at the right hand of God the Father. We come to our brother Jesus, here, week after week, desperate, in need, often ashamed, knowing we deserve absolutely nothing. And yet, what do we receive? We're washed clean of our sin, blessed beyond measure, and fed with the Bread of Life. And we don't have to wonder where this amazing grace comes from. We know, don't we? It flows from the cross where Jesus poured out His very life for our lives, His blood for our forgiveness, His boundless mercy for our deepest needs. And for that ultimate act of love, He. Like Joseph, was cast into the pit of the tomb.

Joseph was thrown into a pit in the ground, a pit that, for all intents and purposes, could have been his tomb. His brothers certainly intended it to be. And then, he was cast into the pit of prison, another tomb of sorts, where he was forgotten and abandoned. But God raised Joseph up, just as He would raise up Jesus, and just as He will raise you up, also. Raised to new life. A life not defined by outward circumstances, not shaped by the actions of others, but a life patterned after Jesus' own life. A life characterized by forgiveness, overflowing with mercy, abounding in love, and marked by compassionate care. A life where God gives these very gifts to others through you.

And perhaps, you'll be surprised. Surprised not just by the forgiveness, love, mercy, and care you receive, but by the forgiveness, love, mercy, and care you find yourself giving. You, who once thought, "I could never forgive that," "I could never love him," "I could never do good to her," because the hurt was too deep, the wounds too raw, the betrayal too profound. And yet, you do forgive. You do love. You do good. With a love and forgiveness which comes from the One who washed you in the waters of baptism and forgives your sins against Him. It comes in the absolution from the One who has mercy on you... who feeds you with His own Body and Blood in the Sacrament. All these are fruits of His cross. All these are gifts that give you the new life you need. **His life**. So you can live a new life. Not a sinless life... a repenting life... a forgiving life.

As St. Paul said in our Epistle, "***As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.***" And we did die, didn't we? The life we were created for, the life God intended for us, we no longer possess in its fullness. We live in a world marred by sin and death, a world of hatred and cursing, selfishness and abuse. And born into sin, sin takes root within us, and we die in sin. But this is also true: in Christ, we're made alive! And this isn't just a promise for the Last Day.

It's a promise for today. In baptism, Jesus takes us into His death and raises us to His life. So, all that we truly need, we already have. And when we need more, He gives even more. His mercy, His love, His forgiveness are given to us in ***“good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, poured into our laps”***, poured into us. And now, we're free to give it away to others.

And when they're amazed, and the love and forgiveness coming their way, you can tell them. You can tell them about a man named Joseph... and a Savior named Jesus. You can tell them about the forgiveness He offered you, and that is available for them. And while we certainly aren't perfect, we serve a perfect God. Perfectly loving. Perfectly merciful. Perfectly forgiving. And because of Him, we can reflect that same love, mercy, and forgiveness. We can be sons and daughters of God, in and through the Son of God. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.