



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you have not seen Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, and especially the version done with Donny Osmond playing Joseph, you are in luck! Because someone pirated the whole thing and put it on YouTube! And you can watch the full-length version! You just Google, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat and there's two versions on there - one without subtitles and one with Russian subtitles. So pick whichever one is best for you. And the musical's lyrics were done in '67 by Tim Rice and the music itself, it was Andrew Lloyd Weber's first musical.

And it tells the story of Joseph, who is one of the 12 sons of Jacob, who had his father's love. He had his father's favor. He was his father's favorite, which you now know makes for an incredibly dysfunctional problem in this family. And on top of it, Joseph tends to have these dreams about all of his older brothers, that they're all going to bow down to him one day. And he tells his older brothers. And this musical, it just does this lovely job of showing just how insufferable Joseph is to his older brothers. I mean, he's strutting around, everything's coming up roses for him. And when his father sees him, his father's eyes light up, but it never happens with any of the other brothers.

And Joseph is deeply content in his father's love while his brothers stew. And they become more and more jealous because Jacob ignores them as if they don't even exist. And if that weren't enough, his father, Jacob, commits the cardinal sin of parents who have more than one kid. He buys a present only for one kid. He gets Joseph a coat of many colors. And Joseph's response to receiving this gift, this coat of many colors, is smug confidence. In the musical, he sings, "I look handsome, I look smart, I am a walking work of art. Such a dazzling coat of colors. How I love my coat of many colors."

The brothers' response? Well, they sing, "Not only is he tactless, but he's also rather dim, for there's eleven of us and only one of him." And they hatch a plan to get rid of their brother. They grab Joseph, they rip off that coat from him, they throw him in a pit and they sell him to some traders who are coming by for twenty pieces of silver. And then they tell their father that he was killed by a wild animal, and they go on with their merry lives without their pesky brother.

And Joseph, Joseph is sold into slavery. He is dragged hundreds of miles from Canaan to Egypt. And he ends up at a rich man's house working for him. And it just goes from bad to worse for Joseph, because in a series of unfortunate events, he gets falsely accused of attempting to seduce the master's wife when all along she was trying to seduce him. And so then he gets thrown into jail for years. For years. And the song of lament that's sung by Donny Osmond while he's in prison is this melancholy tune of a man who's clearly beaten by what has happened to him. "Close every door to me. Hide all the worlds from me. Bar all the windows and shut out the light. Just give me a number instead of my name. Forget all about me and let me decay. I do not matter. I'm only one person. Destroy me completely then throw me away." It is the lowest point in Joseph's life.

Joseph's saga then takes this radical turn through a series of very fortunate events. He gets out of jail. He shows up in front of the Pharaoh and the Pharaoh takes favor on him. And lo and behold, he ends up becoming the second most powerful person in Egypt behind the Pharaoh. And he helps save Egypt and all the surrounding areas from this crazy famine that takes over for seven years. And he masterminds the way of taking care of everyone and making sure Egypt has enough food for the famine that lasts seven years.

And after two years of this famine, after it's spread to Canaan, the brothers, who are hungry, are sent by Jacob the dad, who said, go to Egypt. I hear they have some food. And so he sends all of his sons, except the youngest one, Benjamin, he keeps him at home. And so all the brothers end up showing up at Joseph's feet, begging for food. And then Joseph does something that we tend to gloss over. He exacts retribution from his brother. He makes up a story about them and says, oh, you guys are spies here. And so everybody starts to freak out, including the brothers.

And he sends all the brothers back and says, go get that youngest brother that you keep talking about. And he keeps one and he keeps him in jail. So for months, one of his brothers is languishing in jail. And then they bring back Benjamin and then Joseph frames Benjamin. And it's just a mess. And then we read in the Bible passage for today that Joseph could no longer go on with these plots and these schemes to seek his retribution and revenge and he finally reveals who he is. He's Joseph, the one that the brothers sold into slavery, but God brought him here to Egypt so that he could save people's lives and help people with the famine. And Joseph forgives his brothers twice. And it's all a happy ending.

But how do we get from the clear injustice that was perpetrated on Joseph to everything being forgiven and well? In other words, what can we glean from Joseph's story to be able to deal with our own experience of mistreatment, of

injustice, of victimhood? I have three thoughts about this and I've helpfully titled my little musings for you. Number one, the power of lament. Number two, victory for the victim. And number three, perfection and misery.

So first, the power of lament. Lament is this period of time where you stay in the desolation of the injustice. You stay in the shock of the trauma and the rage that naturally comes from realizing that your life as it should be is no longer that way. It's been stolen or denied from you. And lament is what we do when we realize that we really have lost. It's over. It's irreversible. It's not going to work. And the book of Psalms, they're filled with songs of lament, and these songs are personal, they're painful, and they're always trying to let God know about what's going on.

Here's Psalm 13. "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear the pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say I have prevailed, and my foes will rejoice because I'm shaken."

When Joseph is languishing in that jail, that was his time for lament. He was grieving what was lost. He became angry at what was stolen from him. Any victim that does not lament is short circuiting their own healing. Lament is feeling the loss, it's experiencing the pain, it's crying out in the unfairness, it's going to those dark places where despair takes you.

There is a whole book in the Bible dedicated to lament. It's helpfully called the Book of Lamentations. And it's five chapters. And it's intense. It's intense and it's wallowing. It's fear, it's frustration and sheer pain. But there's this really interesting pattern to the Book of Lamentations. Each chapter is exactly 22 verses long. Except chapter 3, which is smack dab in the middle, that's three times as long. It's 66 verses long. And in the Hebrew alphabet, there are 22 letters. And in each chapter, except the fifth one, each verse begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet and goes in order.

Now here's what I take from this ancient pattern from our spiritual ancestors who wrote Lamentations. When you lament, you have to go through it. You have to go through all of it. You can't skip a letter because then you'll just short circuit the process. And in the middle, in chapter 3, it just feels like it's going to go on forever, right? I mean, it's triple the length, and so there's this sense of like, will this ever end? But the point is, there is a final letter to the alphabet. It will end. It does end. It needs to end. God will make the pain end because God is active in our lives. But until then, you need to lament what has happened to you.

We humans, we tend to feel weak when we lament. We feel like it's totally useless to feel sorry for ourselves. But the scriptures want to change that narrative. It is so bold and courageous of you when you take time to lament, when you take time to experience the sorrow because of your circumstances. And we're actually saying to ourselves in the world, I can see that things are not right in my life right now, and things aren't the way that they're supposed to be. And I'm going to need some time to reconcile myself to this. And when I do, I will come out on the other side. There is a final letter to this alphabet. But until then, I need to do the hard work of lamenting. So I will be with you shortly. But until then, please give me some space and trust that I will do what I need to do.

And after you have lamented, then comes number two. Victory for the victim. Now, in all fairness, this musing was not my thought. It wasn't my original thought. I actually spoke to Father Bill this week, who's on vacation. And I shared with him, oh, you know, I'm going to preach on Joseph and I was thinking about sort of victimhood. And he just off the cuff, as usual, offered this amazing nugget of wisdom that I want to share with you. He said to me, you know, Joseph's story is so relevant today because it offers us a powerful model for leaving behind victimhood.

Because while Joseph was in Egypt, before his brothers came, during the time that he's trying to build up their stocks of food, he's actually happy. He gets married. He has a kid. And he names one of his children Manasseh. And you know what that means in Hebrew? To forget. And he says, God has made me forget all my hardship and my father's house. And this was a sign that Joseph could leave behind his victimhood and no longer let it claim him in the same way. And because of this, when the brothers come, Joseph can actually offer them mercy and grace. He is transformed. He is not a victim. He is a victor.

And I find this insight so valuable because, as Father Bill said to me, this is a larger claim on how to be human and how to experience trauma. To know that you are going to be transformed from victim to victor, because God will give you opportunities for deep transformation. Because that's what it means to live in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God changes our pain to something new. And so this is really good news for all of us victims. You do not have to define your life by the horrible thing that has happened to you. After death, there is always, always resurrection.

Which brings me to my final point. After you've lamented, after you've forgotten, forgiven, then comes the work of living with the ones who have wronged you. And here's what I notice. Joseph has some trouble with this. He actually is trying to get some sort of recompense, some sort of revenge by putting his own brothers through their own living hell of pain and suffering.

I mean, he accuses them of being spies and they're afraid for their lives, and they're afraid they're going to be thrown in jail. And then he sends them on this wild goose chase and they have to bring his brother Benjamin back. And then he frames the little brother Benjamin and now all the brothers are worried that dad at home is going to die because all his kids are going to be thrown into jail. And it's agony for the brothers.

But Joseph's attempt to create some form of justice here for the pain that he actually experienced, it actually backfires on him. He doesn't receive peace. He actually receives more pain. So there's this one scene in the Bible where the brothers still don't know who Joseph is, and Joseph demands that all the brothers be taken to his home. And they're frightened. They're like, oh my gosh, we're in trouble. So they all show up and they're very confused and in front of them is this amazing amount of food.

Now remember, there's a famine so they're hungry. So he has them come to his house so he can prepare a sumptuous feast for them. But they're in Egypt and back then in Egypt they didn't let peoples of different kinds sit with one another. So there were three tables. There was one table for Joseph. There was one table for all the Egyptian servants. And then there was one table for the Hebrews, the brothers. And so they all sat there. And again, the brothers are still confused. They're not really sure what they're doing there.

And Joseph has this amazing amount of food on his table, and there's some food on the brothers' table. And he keeps telling the servants to move the food that's on his table over to his brother's, to the brothers' table. And so, pretty soon, there's a huge feast on the brothers' table. And the brothers, what do they do? Well, the Bible says they eat, and they drink, and they're merry. They're having fun. They're like, hey, it's good food. Let's eat. And they're enjoying it, and they're enjoying each other, and they're having this lovely time with each other. But there's Joseph, segregated at a different table, just watching.

And this is what I learned about Joseph. Joseph was too busy, too busy, seeking a way to make everything right again, to make everything balanced again, by exacting the right kind of pain from his brothers. He wanted them to pay for what they did. He wanted the perfect tit for tat, an eye for an eye. He was seeking powerful justice, but in doing so, all he did was compound his own misery. He didn't eat with them. He didn't laugh with them. He didn't enjoy them. He remained a victim in his story because he was pursuing perfection in justice.

And it made me realize, we victims do this. We want perfect justice. And it just compounds our own misery. We want things to be made just right. We expect it to be a certain way. And we want certain things to happen. And when it doesn't, we don't participate. And we simply compound our own misery because we are

seeking perfection. But I've decided that if you're a victim, you should do the exact opposite. Don't seek perfection. Seek pleasure.

Imagine if Joseph just got up from his table and he's like, dudes, it's me! And he just sat there and they laughed and they enjoyed this beautiful feast. Imagine! Because this is what God is providing for all victims. God is always empowering victims. There is a table, a feast set up in the presence of our enemies. And in the midst of a life of sorrow, there is always a life to be had that has some joy for you.

So I encourage you to try it next time. The next time that you are wronged, the next time you're misunderstood, the next time you are treated unjustly, instead of being annoyed and being angry and being righteous in your understanding that something has been wrong and needs to be righted, just go and seek some pleasure in the middle of it. Seek the place where God's already at work providing for you. Which may mean that you have to sit at the table of your captors and you might have to laugh with your jailers or even share a meal with your duplicitous family. But God is dissipating our pain when we stop wanting things to go a certain way.

You will never have pleasure in your life if you keep seeking everything to be just as you think it should be. Let go of that idol, my friends. And you will experience joy even in the midst of suffering because our lives were not meant to be lived black and white. They were meant to be lived in amazing technicolor.

Amen.