

*Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 16 & 17, 2023
The Truth, The way, and The Life
Genesis 50:15-21*

Funerals and death are an amazing experience.

I don't mean positive when I say that, but it is still amazing in the sense of what I learn about people when someone they love dies. It's like you get a first-time picture of a piece of their soul that was formerly hidden and unknowable during normal day-to-day life.

I have heard heart wrenching confessions that burdened for a lifetime and now, finally, the realization that they didn't need to burden their soul anymore.

I have seen untold anger and anguish at the prospect of life changing in unanticipated ways for the foreseeable future.

I have seen manipulation of money, with little regard for the deceased; long lost relatives coming out of the woodwork that I never knew existed, cosplaying a role in their life I'm pretty sure they never had...

...But worst of all that I have seen is the death bed command.

The death bed command usually comes in one of two ways:

#1. The loved one in the throes of death makes a family member promise something, and that family member is terrorized by a commitment they were ill equipped to accomplish.

or

#2. A devious member was alone with the one dying and claims they heard them whisper their wishes to them. The claim made after death, of course, usually benefits the devious member that was the only one to hear it.

The first is much less common but does happen. The second, though? Fortunately, working with the family, we usually ferret out the ruse and make sure everyone mourns honestly, and the final wishes are honored with integrity. But, it does take the whole family working against the one bad actor, to effectively catch the ruse. If their family is in collusion, or factions break out, I have seen unmentionable family division and pain with little opportunity to mourn.

Some, as in our lesson today, is nothing but pure panicky manipulation with no desire to mourn at all, but rather simple self-preservation at its basest level.

Joseph's brothers messed up, and the only thing covering for them was their father still being alive; at least in their mind. After all, they sold Joseph into slavery as a concession to wanting to murder him in the first place. They were quite jealous of Joseph, and while there is no doubt as to the crime they committed because of said jealousy, there is a bit of debate as to whether he deserved their ire just a little bit.

Joseph, not being the youngest but definitely a favorite, said some pretty outrageous things based on what he had seen in his dreams. Of course the brothers would be irritated that they would bow down to Joseph one day. Of course it would have been smart for Joseph to keep his mouth shut about it. But, Joseph was either not that practical, or smart, or self-aware, or all the above. Something tells me God knew that...and that's exactly why he picked Joseph, to whom he gave the Godly wisdom to endure his hardships, rise to power, and save millions from starvation...

...leading us to where we are today. The brothers knew what he did, they knew what they deserved, and acted accordingly, although deceptively. They were at the mercy of the most powerful man they ever knew, who had the ultimate power over whether they lived or were executed for the crimes they know they committed. So, they had to act fast.

Verse 16 makes that clear using interesting language that reveals their pure panic in the face of the perceived threat against them. First, the message they sent is an ancient form of a command. So, they didn't notify Joseph, they commanded him! How ironic! Then, they reiterated that command by saying that their father, Jacob, commanded this as well, to make sure their sins were forgiven, as servants of the God of your father.

Hmmm, I don't know about you, but I don't know any servants of God that take up human trafficking!

Finally, they made it all up! Every bit!!! Jacob said no such thing, neither would he. After all, why would he? His entire family was living in the peace, safety, and protection of Joseph already.

So, the lying letter is sent. Then the brothers go to Joseph and change their tune again, lying again, claiming to be Joseph's servants instead of servants of the God of your father!

They lie to you. They know they're lying to you, and they know, that you know, that they are lying to you, and yet they still lie to you!

Liar, liar pants on fire! Liar, liar pants on a wire!

They always say the best liar is the liar that believes their lies. They only tell you what they want you to know.

Look, I'm not going to lie. We all lie, whether it's white lies, simple exaggerations, or just leaving out key information that would totally change the story if you left it in. So, we shouldn't judge a lie too harshly...it happens...and it is a sin easily committed. But the serious lie can have real consequences.

She was the accountant for a major grocery chain, and her husband was getting his custom auto shop off the ground, so she managed his books as well. But, he was bad at managing expenses and gave deals to his buddies that were way over-expensed and caused him horrendously imbalanced books. Unfortunately, he didn't know it. Or, maybe he did but didn't care, but she did know it. In fact, she knew it to the tune of \$600,000.00 dollars of debt she was hiding in the accounts for the business.

The deception at the grocery chain started small, by taking just enough money to pay the bills at the auto shop. I guess she felt she could borrow it long enough to get the auto shop profitable and pay it back without anyone noticing. Well, the little amounts turned into larger amounts, and before you knew it, she was \$700,000.00 into the accounts at the major grocery chain. A simple audit caught the theft, and a forensic accountant caught her. The police showed up and took her to her new home in The Stark Correctional Facility for the next 7 years, or until she paid the money back, which we all knew was gone in the wind of poor business management. Her husband found a new woman and left her. She came home 5 years later, two years forgiven for good behavior, to nothing but a room in her parents' house.

As I visited and pastorally cared for her, we talked about what her real problem was, and believe it or not, it was not theft. It was lying. It started when she was a little girl, carried on through her teen years, and finally manifested in crime with the consequences she was paying for now. I never knew if she was telling the truth, but I knew there was no point in lying any more. We knew the worst of her, and she was at rock bottom for sure. So I offered her the one thing that would matter forever, the truth that can only come from a Savior that can redeem you when nothing else can.

Joseph's brothers met that redeemer too.

Joseph, whom they effectively killed for who he was, is not unlike how we killed Jesus for who He is - a stark reminder of our sinful inadequacy in the face of His perfection.

Joseph, like Jesus, was the judge over whether they should live in peace and prosperity or be condemned for the sins they committed against Him.

So, we, like Joseph's brothers, nail each nail into Jesus' hands and feet each time we sin against Him; until we put the spear of our apostasy into His side making sure He was dead on that cross so we could live without His eyes upon our sin.

And Joseph forgave His lying, manipulative, murderous, human-trafficking, brothers, and brought them into His kingdom to live in the finest land Pharaoh had to offer. He promised to be with them and protect them as long as they lived.

We, like the disciples on the day they saw Jesus risen from the dead, see the Man we killed, that was God in the flesh. He had the ultimate power of His victory over the death we caused, making us tremble with fear...what would He do, what do we deserve, will there be mercy?

And in the most miraculous way possible, this God Man Jesus, reveals, that was His plan all along. Let us kill Him, because He was there to die for us, to save us from our sins!

In the great commissioning of the greatest mission we would ever have, Jesus forgave us, incorporated us into His Kingdom, and gave us His word, promising us, "Lo I will be with you even unto the end of the age."

Not to condemn us, but to guide us with the Holy Spirit He sent to us.

Yes, we all lied, but Jesus died, to show us The Truth, The way, and The Life we never need question ever again. AMEN

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