

## ***“The Great Deliverance”***

You have heard Jesus say, “love one another, just as I have loved you” (Jn. 13:34) – and that sounds good – you’re on board with that. But now, in the Gospel reading today, He says – “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” – and now you’re wondering, “Is He serious?”

If I do what Jesus says ..... well ..... I’ll be abused, people will take advantage of me – if I lend without expecting anything back, I’ll be poor!

Isn’t that interesting? Just previously Jesus said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven” – and, “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.” (Luke 6:20-23)

“Blessed”? Is He serious? Maybe we should ask Joseph, the one we hear about in the Old Testament reading for today.

If you’re not familiar with the biblical story of Joseph – I encourage you to read about him in Genesis 37-50 sometime – it really is an amazing, and true, story. For now, I’ll give you a bit of an overview.

Joseph was one of the sons of Jacob – but not just any son – Jacob’s favorite son. He showed his love for Joseph by giving him a coat of many colors, and in many other ways – and as you might expect – his brothers were jealous – so much so, that his life is in danger.

One day they see an opportunity to take care of daddy’s favorite son. They’d actually planned to kill him – but instead – they sold him to some slave traders who were passing by.

Joseph is hauled up out of the pit the brothers had thrown him into – and taken away, away from the Promised Land, down to Egypt where he becomes a slave in Potiphar’s house. But the Lord was with him – and he found favor with both God and man – including Potiphar’s wife.

Joseph faithfully serves his master – but when he refuses the advances of Potiphar’s wife – she falsely accused him of trying to take advantage of her! She speaks evil of him – and he’s hauled away again, and thrown into the pit of a prison --- but the Lord was with him.

Even in jail, the Lord has good use for Joseph. He interprets the dreams of some fellow prisoners – and long story short, he’s hauled up out of prison and placed in charge of Pharaoh’s house and all of Egypt.

The Lord was at work through Joseph to save lives. A great famine threatens not only the Egyptians, but also his father and family back in the Promised Land of Israel. So his father and family come to Egypt to buy food, to be fed, to be saved.

Through it all – from favored son and hated brother to imprisoned slave – from convict to the second-hand-man to the Pharaoh of Egypt – through it all, the Lord was with him.

And that brings us to our text for today – where Joseph’s brothers – those jealous, guilty of premeditated murder, thinking Joseph is dead and gone, brothers – now stand before him, face to face.

This is the Season of Epiphany – and Joseph has quite the epiphany for his brothers. “I am Joseph,” he says – manifesting himself to his brothers. You can imagine the shock, the fright, the horror, they must have experienced at this revelation. “We’re doomed!”

Little Joey isn’t so little anymore. He’s a grown man – and powerful, with great authority – and their lives are in his hands!

“Come near to me,” he says to them. The instinct is to run away ..... but they come near. Probably like dogs bowing their heads to the alpha male – or like a little child approaching father for impending discipline, with hands over his rear end.

And then the sermon – a Law and Gospel sermon. “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.”

Is he serious? It's amazing! Joseph is not angry – out to settle the score, or get revenge – he doesn't give them what they deserve. No, he embraces them, kisses them. He is merciful to them. He forgives them.

Joseph is like Jesus Christ. He is sent to save sinners. Jesus, The Savior, was hated by the very ones He loves and comes to save. He is handed over by His own countrymen. He is innocent, and yet, He is murdered by crucifixion on a cross.

Through it all – He loves His enemies – He does good to those who hate Him – He doesn't withhold anything, not even His life. What looks like the most god-awful thing is actually the most loving thing.

Jesus, the beloved Son of God, willingly gives up His life into death for all sinners – and that includes each and everyone of us. His holy, precious blood that is shed – His innocent suffering and death – defeats all the enemies of God. His sacrifice redeems all who are captive to sin. He breaks the bonds, and brings life out of death.

And now, today, He says to you – “Come near to me.” The temptation is to run away – but He speaks kindly to you. “Do not be distressed ... you sold me ... but God sent me before you to preserve life.”

Even now, Jesus Christ your Savior reveals Himself to you as you stand before Him as guilty as can be. He embraces you – He weeps with joy and kisses you. He is merciful to you, saying those three greatest words of all ..... “I forgive you.”

Is Jesus serious about you being merciful to all, friend and enemy alike? Absolutely! So much so that He dies for you. He saves you. He resurrects you to new life – a life of faith and love. He showers His grace and mercy upon you, so that His grace and mercy may overflow from you to all who need His mercy. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.