February 24, 2019

Richland Presbyterian Church, Richland, MI

God Intends The Good

Texts:

Genesis 45:4-7, and 50:19-20, You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good… the saving of many lives.

Matthew 6:25-34, Look at the birds of the air…your Heavenly Father feeds them…are you not much more valuable than they?

Romans 8:28, …in all things, God works for the good of those who love him…

Special Solo:  His Eye Is On The Sparrow

The account of Joseph, son of Jacob, the kid with the many colored coat, is more than a children’s story.  It is the grand climax of the Book of Genesis.  It is a magnificent account of Salvation, the Redemption and Salvation of God’s people.

Joseph is the youngest son of Jacob, the son born to Jacob’s loved wife.  Joseph is probably the spoiled baby of the family, given all the attention of his parents, perhaps to the neglect of the older brothers.  Joseph gets all the gifts and new stuff, the coat of many colors, while the brothers lived in hand-me-downs.  Joseph is kept at home, trained to be the manager of the family business while the brothers are the ones to be managed.  Joseph is sent out to be the checker-upper; the brothers are the check-ees.  Seeing the little kid coming alone, a plan is hatched but, trying to be generous towards the brothers, the plan probably gets out of hand quickly.  Joseph is sold into slavery and disappears into Egypt.  Years pass by as the brothers earn a rather unsavory reputation causing problems and mayhem along the way.  Years later the brothers come into Egypt begging for a handout of Egyptian grains stored up against the severe drought.  The whole family imigrates to Egypt under the protection of Joseph.  At the death of father Jacob, the brothers fear Joseph will act like they would, take revenge.  They come to Joseph, not repenting anything, but seeking reassurances of safety.  In the grand pronouncement of the theme of Genesis, indeed the very plan and intention of God, Joseph proclaims:

“Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”  (NIV, Genesis 50:19-20)

From the choosing of Abraham through the tragedies and trauma vested on Joseph, God intended the salvation of the Chosen People of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, renamed Israel.  From his birth through his education, his slavery in Egypt, God intended not only the Salvation of the Children of Abraham, but also the person of Joseph.  And in this history, God demonstrates his intentions and works for your “good”, for your Redemption and Salvation.

The point is that Joseph saw in all that was happening to him as God at work.  God was bringing opportunity, help to overcome disaster, key individuals that protected or advanced the security of Joseph and his alienated family, the Children of Abraham.  Joseph was able to see what God was doing, even as his brothers and his father Jacob did not.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “… in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him…”  Paul could be paraphrasing Joseph’s great testimony.

In God’s Big Picture, Joseph and Paul are ultimately referring to the Salvation in Christ Jesus of God’s People.  But we can also capture a smaller, more personal picture.

How often is it, or was it, that we find ourselves up to our neck in alligators.  We forget that it was our choice to go swimming and our choice to ignore the alligators as they left the shoreline.  And how often is it, when we call out for help, and when that help arrives, and when we are pulled out of the waters, that we reflect back on how close to total disaster we came, not thinking of how it was that a certain person happened by to hear our cry, and how another person happened to have a rope or a net and a third might have added strength to pull on the ropes to pull us out.  Joseph would say, Paul would say, all that help wasn’t just accidental, it was God working for your good.

Early in my ministry I was drawn into a ministry in the local jail and in the state penitentiaries.  The mostly men I worked with had misbehaved and would be serving serious jail time.  As I worked with them I tried to bring God into the picture, saying it was not God’s intention they end up in prison, but it was God’s intention to redeem this disaster into something better if they would be trust or re-trust God.  God would bring to them help in the form of counseling, education, family on the outside, help maybe through their lawyer, maybe even release, though that was not guaranteed.  Trust God and watch and see.  All things, even there is prison, God works for the good of those who love Him.

In the course of our lives we experience much, the betrayal of friends, being fired or laid-off  from a job, financial ruin, death of a loved one, death of love and divorce, misbehavior of a child or sibling.  We get old, dreaded cancer or other serious sickness appears .  We are overcome.  But even then as friends offer support, as advisors appear, as food is brought to the house, as doctors come, or for us older folk, as children step up and step in, as Pastor comes to sit with us, God is at work if we would but see it.  In our misery it is not that God has gone elsewhere, but that we don’t see.

Jesus talks about the birds of the air being taken care of.  The birds he talks of are the pigeons or doves that cost a penny, the birds Joseph bought and offered in sacrifice for the baby Jesus.  God took care of those pigeons until they were needed.  And Jesus says you are worth much much more, so surely you should understand God is taking care of you.  Look about and see what God is doing, how God is working, on your behalf.

It need not be something dramatic, but totally mundane.  You receive an unexpected phone call from a friend.  In an ordinary day, you suddenly see a lovely flower or a sunrise or a sunset, or a hummingbird comes to your garden, or a Baltimore Oriel flies alongside as you are walking or jogging, and you spirits are lifted.  Maybe your spouse cooks or treats you to a special unscheduled meal.  Maybe in church the preacher says something that speaks truth to you that clears your thinking or answers your questions.  A friend comes over on a lonely day  just to sit and chat.  God is working for your good; God is taking care of the birds of the air.

The key into all this is God of course.  Receiving God’s grace in Christ Jesus.  Living God’s Grace by the  Holy Spirit.  Knowing that God is there, right beside.  Watching, practicing and watching and seeing…in all things God is working for your good, and the good of those who love Him…

Amen

Rev Kenneth Hetzel, retired