

God Does Have a Plan

Lenten Midweek #6 – 04/06/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 45:1-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 5, [Joseph says to his brothers,] “...**God sent me before you to preserve life.**”

Introduction

- ⊗ “God has a plan.” I’m sure you’ve all heard, and maybe even said that before. Often it is said in circumstances that are inexplicable or tragic. “God has a plan.”
 - ➔ I’ve often heard it on the local news when, for example, a family loses a teenage son or daughter in a fatal car accident. God has a plan.
 - ➔ Most of the time, neither the one speaking or the one receiving the message has any idea what that plan is or where that plan is taking them. And experience shows that often times, the plan seems painful.
- ⊗ To be honest, I have personally struggled over the years whether or not it is helpful to tell people who are struggling, “God has a plan”, not because I have ever questioned that it’s true, but more because I wasn’t always certain of how that statement might be received.
 - ➔ I’ve worried that saying “God has a plan” might be heard as just a cliché rather than a truly comforting word in the moment. It’s fair to wonder if people say it because it’s an easy cop-out or because they intend it as an honest message to help clarify the situation. Is it trite or truthful to say, “God has a plan”?

I. God’s Plan for Joseph

- ⊗ As our *Lenten Journey with Joseph* moves one step closer to its culmination tonight, the theme that emerges from the Old Testament Reading is that “God Does Have a Plan”.
 - ➔ And the thing is – that plan is often completely hidden from us. We see, hear, and experience a terrible event of some kind, but along with it – in, with, under and through that terrible thing, God continues to do His thing – which is wonderful!
 - ➔ The jealousy and hatred of Joseph’s brothers led them to do something completely despicable; selling their own flesh and blood into slavery in a foreign land. It’s pure evil. But in, with, and under those same evil circumstances, we learn in our Reading tonight that God was at work; preparing salvation for His people and ensuring the survival of Abraham’s descendants through whom the promised Christ would one day be born.
- ⊗ So it ends up that Joseph’s brothers had unknowingly been a part of God’s plan.
 - ➔ Tonight’s text tells us of the reunion that those brothers never saw coming. And when it finally happens; when they hear the high-ranking Egyptian official say to them, “I am Joseph”, they are dismayed, terrified, unable to speak because their jaws have hit the floor.
 - ➔ I’m sure that they expected the worst. Yet in one sentence, Joseph describes how God’s good plan and the evil plan of his brothers unfolded simultaneously. Verse five, “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life”.

✘ Joseph told his brothers: “You sold me...but God sent me”. Well, which is it? Did Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery or was God the one who sent Joseph down that path? Was Joseph a victim of evil or was he a savior for the starving world?

→ The most accurate answer to those questions is, “Yes”. It’s not either/or. Instead it’s both/and. Yes, this is both the evil sin of Joseph’s brothers AND the wonderful, awesome plan of God.

II. God’s Plan is Always Forgiveness

✘ God has a plan. And tonight’s readings make clear that at the center of God’s plan is forgiveness. God’s plan moves forward and succeeds only because of forgiveness.

→ It’s truly a profound testament to the power of forgiveness to see how Joseph treats his brothers. This is what unconditional love and forgiveness looks like.

→ Remember, Joseph is now the most powerful man in the world. And before him are the same brothers who betrayed him, down on their knees, guilty of great evil, deserving of death. But what does Joseph do? With eyes overflowing with tears, he forgives them, speaks tenderly to them, comforts and kisses every last brother! Oh yeah, AND he also tells them the good news: that God has a plan.

✘ Think for just a moment: what if Joseph had not forgiven them? What if Joseph had done what comes so naturally to the sinful nature? What if Joseph had subscribed to the world’s idea that “turnabout is fair play”; that “revenge is a dish best served cold”? Or what if he had spoken forgiveness to them but then sent them back home empty-handed to starve? What if he had imprisoned or enslaved them in order to make them earn their way back into his good graces?

→ If Joseph doesn’t forgive his brothers, then God’s plan is imperiled; God’s plan to save the whole world, including you and me, is jeopardized.

→ How will Abraham’s seed secure the salvation that God had promised if the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah were to come to a screeching halt just because Joseph wouldn’t let go of the sins committed against him?

→ It’s even more serious than that; if Joseph doesn’t forgive, then the Passion of our Lord Jesus described in tonight’s reading of the Passion History might never have come to pass.

III. God’s Plan – Centered in His Son

✘ The crucifixion scene sketched out by the Gospel writers is not unlike the scene of Joseph and his brothers. The most powerful man in the world, the very Son of God, hangs from a Roman tool of torture; beaten and bloodied; enduring a fresh surge of pain at every breath.

→ And as Jesus looks down from the cross, surveying the scene, what do His disciples do? They abandoned Him.

→ His Father has forsaken Him. He is surrounded by sinners who hate Him; who mock Him; who eagerly await His death. Yet Jesus submits His entire life to God’s plan in order to save the world.

- Jesus seeks no revenge on His enemies, but instead He prays for them: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). Jesus sheds His blood and submits to death for all of His brothers and sisters, which includes you. This is what forgiveness looks like. Yes, God has a plan and this – Jesus on the cross – is it. God’s plan is that Jesus would die for sin so that you, my dear friend will be saved!
- ✘ This plan of God for life and salvation has been underway since long before Joseph was born – ever since our first parents ushered sin and its wages into the world. At that time God’s plan in Christ was largely hidden.
- And at Christ’s passion the plan was obscured by the evil schemes of men like Pilate and Herod; like the scribes and Pharisees, and all who wanted Jesus out of the way. So make no mistake y’all – your sin and mine was the driving force behind those nails that pierced our Savior. Each one of us needs to fully confess that “my sin ... my sin was the reason for the crucifixion”.
- And at the same time – in, with, and under this terrible thing – God was doing His thing; a wonderful work that can never be matched. In our Epistle Reading, Paul says in Romans 5:9-10, “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.”
- ✘ That is the best news you will ever ever hear. It means that you don’t get what you deserve. Just like Joseph’s brothers with their guilty consciences and their jaws on the floor, you and I don’t get what we have coming because of our sin.
- Why? Because Jesus forgives us. Jesus speaks tenderly to us through the preaching and proclamation of His promises. Jesus comforts and strengthens us with the cup of salvation. That is God’s plan for every one of us; every single person ever to reside on this earth!
- ✘ And flowing from this grand plan of salvation is God’s plan for you. You see, your life is not just a random series of events – actions and reactions, causes and effects – that in the end are mostly meaningless.
- Far from it! Your Baptism is a clear statement that God is determined to have His way with you ... and His way is always good! Now, we who have been forgiven understand that God’s plan also always involves our forgiveness of others. So to refuse to forgive those who sin against us ... well, that hinders God’s plan. It is so much better by far to let go of our neighbor’s sin and forgive him/her so that God can do His saving work according to His plan.

Conclusion

- ✘ So, it’s not trite, but truthful; it’s not a cliché, but a comfort to know and to say that “God has a plan for you”; a plan that centers your life in the life of your Savior, Jesus.
- And the trials and travails of Joseph remind us not to worry when brothers betray us, or when temptation comes our way. If ever it seems like much of your life is wasted and worthless, remember Joseph; remember his years in prison.

✘ We cannot always know; we cannot always see what God is doing or what He is planning. We can only believe. We can only trust that He is working all things for our eternal good, through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That is His plan! And that is everything. Amen.