

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Unstoppable: God is relentlessly working for our good.

Scripture: Genesis 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21

Rev. Steve Filyk

September 27, 2020

Songs/Hymns: God of grace and God of glory 490 (1-3,5) Days of Elijah (Robin Mark) Forgive our sins 751, Be still, my soul 749 (1,2)

"I'm glad I'm getting old." He proclaims
As he pushes the newspaper to the side.
"Someone else can deal with this mess."

"I'm glad I'm getting old." She whispers
As she deletes the email from the church.
"Someone else can deal with this mess."

"I'm glad we're getting old." They chime together
As they turn off the speakerphone
and end the call with their children
"Someone else can deal with this mess."

"I'm glad I'm getting old.
Someone else can deal with this mess."

Have you ever heard someone say something like this? (hands?)
Have you ever said it yourself? (hands)

So what is being communicated in this statement?

I think that in part it is a glad declaration
That one's time of active service is over
And that the present challenges
Are in the next generation's hands.

I think that in part it expresses frustration
with the rapid pace of change
and a world that is becoming harder to understand.

And I think that in part it is a lament.
A lament there is just so much brokenness in the world around us.
A lament that evil seems to have the upper hand.

We say it to ourselves.
“The world is a mess
And there’s nothing that can be done.”

But are those things that we tell ourselves true?

PAUSE

Last week we encountered Abraham.

When God first called Abraham,
God gave him these promises:

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”ⁱ

When God first called Abraham,
God made some incredible promises.

Even though Abraham was old and Sarah was barren,
Even though their faith wavered as time sped on.
God made strides toward fulfilling that promise.

Sarah gave birth to Isaac.
A baby was born in the geriatric ward.

Today we encounter the story of Abraham's great-grandson Joseph.
The question in this story is not about the human biology
Standing in the way of that promise,
but whether humanity
in its brokenness and sin will keep
the promises from being fulfilled.

What you should know at the outset of today's story
is that Joseph is part of a blended family.
He is presently is the one and only son
of Jacob's favorite wife.

What you have heard
Is that despite being the youngest
Jacob is favored over all his older siblings.

More than that, this favoritism isn't hidden.
Jacob has given Joseph a designer robe,
a visible reminder of this special affection.

Understandably, this makes Joseph's brothers jealous.

But Joseph antagonises them further.

He shares with his brothers the dreams that he's been having;
Dreams that show him wielding authority over his brothers,
Even his parents.

This doesn't win him any favour with them.

As you've already heard
When an opportunity presents itself,
they determine to have him killed.

They are only talked out of murder when Judah suggests
That selling him to human traffickers might be more profitable.
They can make a few bucks and get rid of him too.

So how would you like to be part of this family?
A family where the father creates discord among his children.
A family where jealousies turn to thoughts of murder.
Doesn't seem like God is present
among these so-called 'chosen people'.

And while God isn't mentioned in Genesis chapter 37
early listeners to this story would recognise God's presence.

God is present in Joseph's dreams.
These are dreams of promise.

Yes they speak of an exalted position for Joseph.
But they also speak of prosperity and honor for the family.
They are depicted as sheaves of grain
in a land dependent on agriculture.
They are envisioned as stars
in world where the heavens
were seen as the home of God.

God is present in these dreams of promises.
But Joseph's brothers decide to dash them.
"Come now, let's kill him
and throw him into one of these cisterns...
Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."ⁱⁱ

This dream is undermined by Joseph's brothers.

In the story that continues
this dream is opposed by the Empire into which Joseph is sold.

While Joseph gets a good start as a servant of an Egyptian officer
He is falsely accused and ends up in an Egyptians jail.
Can it get any worse than being a slave in prison?

But the God of Israel is constantly working to fulfill God's promises.
Through a long series of God-directed events
Joseph is brought to Pharaoh's attention
and Joseph becomes the architect
of the Egyptian response
To upcoming years of abundance and scarcity.

Because of Joseph's leadership an empire will survive famine.
Because of his leadership his own family
will be given shelter during desperate times.

Joseph understands God's activity in the dreams he was given.
He tells his fearful brothers, begging for their lives in Genesis 50
(a vivid picture of that first dream):

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good
to accomplish what is now being done,
the saving of many lives."ⁱⁱⁱ

This story acknowledges human brokenness.
The world of Joseph's family and the Egyptian empire is a mess.
But this story reminds us that God remains active,
Relentlessly accomplishing God's purposes.

Biological limitations won't prevent God's promises.
Brokenness and sin won't stand in the way of God's purposes.
God is relentlessly active both through us, and in spite of us.

We don't just see this in the Old Testament.
It becomes even clearer in the New.

As one commentator has noted:
"The New Testament story of Jesus
has many parallels to the Joseph story,
The main one being that Jesus' kin
also plotted to kill him.

[But did their success mark] the end of God's plan of salvation?
By no means.

Just as God used the evil deeds of Joseph's brothers
to save his people [from famine],
So God used the evil deeds of Jesus' kin
to save his people from their sin...

[Our] sovereign God overrules the evil intentions of people
To accomplish [God's] plan of salvation."^{iv}

Do you ever lament the sin in the world,
The brokenness in your church and family?

Are you ever overwhelmed by the darkness around you?
Are you ever convinced that evil has the upper hand?

The Bible teaches us that even in the midst of evil
God is relentlessly working.

And what Joseph's story and what Jesus' story reminds us
Is that God's dream of rescue and salvation will prevail.

PAUSE

This is my Saviour's world;
Oh let me not forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.

This is my Savior's world;
The battle is not done;
Jesus who died, shall be satisfied,
And earth and heaven by one.^v

ⁱ Genesis 12:1-3 NIV

ⁱⁱ Genesis 37:20 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 37:20 NIV

^{iv} Sidney Greidanus "Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, Year A" *The Lectionary Commentary: The Old Testament and Acts* 86

^v "This is my Father's world" *The New Book of Praise* p424