

**POETIC JUSTICE****Genesis 42**

**Intro:** A couple weeks ago, as I made my way in the early morning hours toward Columbus where Maribeth was going to have surgery, I did what so many Ohioans are wont to do – I was driving in the middle lane. Let me assure you, there was no good reason not to because there was practically no traffic. If I was in the middle, I could easily pass any moseying vehicle in the right lane and anyone who thought my 75 miles per hour too slow could easily pass me in the left lane. So, imagine my dismay and disgust at a Lexus driver who thought to blow my doors off on my right, doing at least 90. I was offended that he couldn't even pass me in the passing lane. But imagine my glee, when, just as he passed me at such a tremendous rate of speed, I saw a State Trooper pull out of the median, turn on his blue lights and pull the Lexus over. HA! Take that you scofflaw! It was a clear case of poetic justice and I was vindicated.

I've experienced poetic justice at my own hands too many times to remember. One was in a confrontation with a neighbor many years ago. I've told this story here before, as a matter of fact, it's an entire sermon, so I'll only recount the pertinent info.

My neighbor was a pariah. He seemed to seek ways to make the people who lived around him upset enough to want to cause him serious bodily harm. I endeavored to stay out of the fray. After all, I was the neighborhood preacher and I was too good to stoop to petty neighborhood squabbles. I had tried, unsuccessfully, to be a peacemaker several times to no avail. But then he made *me* mad. One Sunday afternoon when we were away visiting family our dog got free of her leash and deigned to go onto this man's property. Now, mind you, my dog was no pit-bull. She was a Chihuahua/Miniature Dachshund mix and no attack dog for sure. But my neighbor called the State Police. And I was charged with not keeping my dog restrained. I had to go to court. The man lied about me in court. I had to pay a fine. Hate was too tame a word, I began to loath the man. I intended to have a talk with him and let him know what kind of lower form of life he was but he never gave me the chance. It seemed that once he did his dirty work he never crawled out from under his rock long enough to give me the satisfaction. Finally, after about a month had gone by, I saw him outside as I was driving past. I didn't want to miss the golden opportunity to give him a piece of my mind, so I stopped my car, hopped out, and stomped toward him, getting ready to give him a well-rehearsed diatribe.

Know what he did? **HE LAUGHED AT ME!** Well, actually he laughed and pointed behind me to my car which was rolling down the street WITH MY THREE YEAR OLD SHEILA INSIDE!!!! In my haste to deal vengeance I had not set the parking brake and somehow knocked it out of gear. I never got to chew his ear off because I had to run and catch up to my car and prevent a wreck and or injury to my child. I did successfully do that and I got in the car and drove away, chastened and humbled. Poetic justice? You bet.

The world would say, "What goes around, comes around." A Buddhist would say that it was karma. We as Christ Followers know is as something that is often quoted as "Make sure your sins find you out." which is loosely based on Numbers 32:23 where Moses warns the Israelites . . . *you may be sure that your sin will find you out.* It is the latter which best describes poetic justice and the story that is unfolding in our text for today. Let me read some of it to you. Again, these are long passages so it will not be on the screen. So, as I have in past weeks, let me give you a heads-up for next week. Read Genesis 43 for next Sunday. Now listen as I read Genesis 42:1-17 (**Read**).

Don't you love how God works things out? He is lovingly teaching a lesson to Joseph and his brothers – and it's poetic how he does it. Here's the lesson – sin that is not dealt with will come back to haunt you. And the lesson is not just for Joseph's brothers who had dealt so treacherously with him – Joseph was learning too, and we can as well.

Let's take it in order. First, along with Joseph's brothers, we learn from this to . . .

**Make sure your sin finds you out**

- Poetic justice isn't for the purpose of guilty persons getting their due – it's for the purpose of justice being done and redemption and even reconciliation occurring. Guilt is a key component of this. But we're in a society that has an aversion to guilt, so we simply say anything goes. If everything is okay, we don't have to be guilty about anything. The problem is, this is contrary to what the Bible teaches and we are still people of the Book. There are some things that are just not okay. Guilt helps us with that. And it helped the men who came to Egypt for grain.

- Joseph immediately recognized his brothers even though it was some 20 or more years later. It was easy, they still looked like the bearded Hebrew shepherds in rough desert clothing that he remembered. They, on the other hand, did not recognize him. Verse 13 indicates they thought he was dead. But even if they somehow knew he had survived, they still did not know him. He had been Egyptianized. He had been a teenage boy when they sold him off, and now they were facing a clean-shaven Egyptian official wearing fine linen. It was the perfect opportunity for Joseph to give them what they deserved and he possessed more than enough reason and power to do it.
- But he didn't. Being human and far from perfect, Joseph no doubt entertained the idea of vengeance, instead, he did little more than toy with them as they squirmed through their three-day incarceration, tortured by reignited guilty consciences.
- It worked. Their guilt was palpable. Listen, *They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us."* Reuben replied, *"Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."* Genesis 42:21-22. The ten brothers had no idea who this stern Egyptian regent was, but they knew without a doubt, what they had done to their seventeen-year-old brother so many years before. They remembered him pleading for his life – and they remembered their complete lack of mercy as they counted the meager coins they had received from selling him. Their cold-hearted past blew into their present like a dust storm from the Arabian desert, choking and beating them down.
- Their sin had found them out and they knew it. Sin has a way of doing that. Sin has a really great memory. Sin will not let you forget. These guys would soon deal with it and we'll see that over the next month. But in the meantime, let's be asking, why? Why does sin have such a great memory? Well, it's because we have such a merciful God. He is God of second chances and he gives us opportunity to deal with the guilt of sin. He invites us to come clean and when we do, he promises to cleanse us and wash that guilt away (1 John 1:9). Do you have sin that keeps reminding you that you need to deal with it? That's your loving God at work. Deal with it and he'll wipe the guilt away. Mind you, there may be consequences – sometimes they will remain, but the guilt is gone – count on it.
- But I'm getting ahead of myself. The other thing we learn from Genesis 42 is that we need to . . .

**Make sure their sin doesn't find YOU out**

- Let me explain what I mean. I've already pointed out that, humanly speaking, Joseph would have been completely in his rights to throw the book at his brothers. But he didn't. This is what separates the sheep from the goats. The worldly response is revenge. The godly response is redemption.
- Joseph could have revealed himself to them in that first meeting. He could have had the visceral satisfaction I experienced when I saw the State Patrol's blue lights come on and bear down on the white Lexus. But my satisfaction was not godly. Joseph knew it would not have been godly for him to mete out vengeance on his brothers. In fact, as he realized what they were saying, since he understood their Hebrew, it says in verse 24 that he turned away and wept. Despite their treachery, he still loved them deeply. Their sin did not cause him to sin. Their sin did not find him out to be any less than an instrument of redemption.
- But it was a process. He had some teaching to do. Their sin would find them out and they would learn from it. We'll see that over the next several weeks. In other words, TO BE CONTINUED.

**Conclusion:** The old song thrills,

*Glory I'm saved!*

*Glory I'm saved!*

*My sins are all pardoned, my guilt is all gone!*

But maybe, even if you're saved, you're experiencing guilt that is real or imagined. Name it. Deal with it. Talk to the person you offended. Rectify the damaged relationship. Go to God in prayer and say "I'm sorry, take this guilt away and help me walk in repentance." Whatever it is. Deal with it. If you need to talk – come to the prayer circle after the service is over or come and talk to me. I've got experience dealing with guilt and sin – I'm a sinner saved by a gracious God and I want you to know about him. Don't carry it around anymore – you don't have to. Make sure your sin finds you out and then allow God to pull you out of it. In fact – today as we

partake in communion it's the perfect opportunity to make things right immediately, or resolve to make it right ASAP.

And many of you have been sinned against in the way Joseph was. Betrayed by the very people you should trust. You have every right, in the world's eyes, for vengeance and justice. But don't stoop to that. Don't let their sin find you out. Even as they deal with the wrong they've incurred, you can be an instrument of God's redemption. It's poetic justice. God's justice bringing reconciliation, redemption and right relationship. Amen.