

# "The Theology of the Cross" Genesis 50:15-20

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Only true God - in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Joseph encountered much evil and suffered for many years because of what his brothers had done to him. Several of his brothers wanted to murder him but settled to go along with the plan of throwing him into a waterless pit and finally of selling him as a slave to a caravan heading south. Faithful Joseph served as a trustworthy slave in Potiphar's house before being falsely accused of an awful crime and sentenced to years in prison. We cannot even begin to know what Joseph went through physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually as an innocent alien and as a sentenced slave sitting in foreign jail, being so and doing so for years.

Despite these many hardships, the Lord remained with Joseph and was his source of strength. Could God have delivered Joseph at any time? Yes, but He didn't. Though the things done to Joseph by his brothers, by Potiphar's wife, by Potiphar and others was sin, was contrary to God's commanded will, were transgressions of God's Law ... God permitted Joseph to suffer for many years before he was finally delivered and put into a position of power in Egypt ... before Joseph finally had the opportunity to have his brothers before him.

Had Joseph been a man looking for revenge for what his brothers had done, he would have taken upon himself to declare a reviling judgment that he had no right to make. Had Joseph been an advocate of what is too often heard and claimed in Christendom today, he would have doubted that God knew where he was, or thought that God hated him, or thought that he didn't have enough faith for those many years of suffering. What a blessing for Joseph's brothers, that, following the death of their father and the brothers appearance before Joseph that this Old Testament patriarch believed, confessed, taught and practiced ...

... *The Theology of the Cross*

*When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, 'Say to Joseph, "Forgive, I pray you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him, and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But*

*Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."*

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

Once again, we must be absolutely certain that we have the preliminaries straight on this. God does not will sin. He does not want anyone to transgress His holy Law. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and He Himself tempts no one" (James 1:13)*. Likewise, the Lord is not the author of evil. Rather it is from the Tempter, the old Evil Foe, *"the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 20:2)*. Now, since the Fall of Adam and Eve, it is out of the sinful heart of man that *"come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matthew 15:19)*. God is not to be blamed for the murderous thoughts, betrayal, false witness and wicked deeds of Joseph's brothers. Those are their sins. The Lord is neither the cause nor the source nor the motivation for the lustful desires, adulterous words and false accusations of Potiphar's wife. Those are her sins.

But just as firmly as the truth is that God does not will sin, so also we must maintain that God permits those things to happen. He allowed those brothers to cast Joseph into the pit when He could have prevented it. He allowed those sons of Israel, those brothers to betray their brother and hand him over for a few coins and God had the power to stop it and didn't. The Lord permitted the lies of Potiphar's wife to prevail and the Almighty One didn't intercede to stop the injustice. Then there are all the consequent personal sufferings that follow ... the loneliness, the separation, anguish, fear, the questions, the struggles. And it's not just Joseph. The Scriptures tell us of Job whom Satan afflicted with the Lord's permission. There's the widow whose only son dies while the prophet Elijah is there. Jeremiah brings the Word of God to those who need to hear it and they cast him into a waterless cistern where he sinks into the mire.

So his brothers stood before him at that place where they gathered. What would he say to them who had betrayed him and deserted him? They listen intently for on the lips of this second person of Egypt is their future. Will he order their immediate execution? Listen to what he says, *"Fear not, for am I in the place of God?"* My dear brothers, am I going to stand in the way of what the Lord ultimately wanted accomplished? Who am I to interfere with what God has planned? If it was God's purpose that you not die and that He permitted this and that in order to accomplish His plan, and that He has, over the years and decades and centuries guided and shaped the events of history so that you stand before me here this day, then who am I to contradict Him? *"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."*

God has a grand picture over all that takes place and, while not willing evil or sin, He is capable of directing everything to that which accomplishes His purpose. He allowed those sons of Israel, those brothers to betray their brother and hand him over for a few pieces of silver and God had the power to stop it and He didn't. In fact, when one of those brothers says *"God forbid, Lord!"* the Divine rebuke is swift and sharp, *"Get thee behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Matthew 16:22-23)*.

The Lord permitted the lies of Caiaphus and the weakness of Pilate to prevail and the Almighty One didn't intercede to stop the false testimony and the injustice. When one of the brothers unsheathes

his sword and begins hacking in his attempt to halt the injustice and suffering that are approaching Jesus, our Lord commands him to put his sword away and says, *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"* (Matthew 26:53-54). Then there are all the consequent personal sufferings that follow ... the loneliness of being forsaken by the Father, the separation of body and spirit, the anguish of hell and the question of why as he atones for the sins of Joseph's brothers, the sins of Joseph, the sins of Potiphar's wife, of Potiphar, of Elijah, of the widow whose only son dies, of Jeremiah, of Caiaphus, of Pilate and every sin of yours. The suffering is beyond comprehension and God permitted it. The One, Great, Sufficient Sacrifice is complete and on the third day He rose again from the dead.

So his brothers stood before him at that place where they gathered. What would he say to them who had betrayed him and deserted him? They listen intently for on the lips of this Second Person of the Trinity is their future. Will He order their immediate execution? Listen to what he says, *"Peace be with you"* (John 20). In other words, "Fear not! Did I accomplish the salvation of your souls only to kill you? No. My dear brothers, it was God's purpose that you not die eternally and that He permitted this all to happen to Me in order to accomplish His plan, and that He has, over the years and decades and centuries guided and shaped the events of history so that you stand before me here this day? As for the world, yea, even you, you meant evil against Me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

Dearly beloved, the greatest revelation of this gracious and merciful God is the cross of Christ. This is called the Theology of the Cross. Here it is, in weakness and suffering that we see the Lord God Almighty most clearly ... in fact, it is in the cross that God wants to be recognized. In the humble Word and the simple water, you have been baptized into the death of Christ. *We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death* (Roman 6:3-4). *You have been crucified with Christ and it is not longer you who lives but Christ Who lives in you* (Gal. 2:20).

You know this, for it is on account of the theology of the cross that you have come here Sunday after Sunday and seek the forgiveness that He has promised. You confess, "I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being." On the basis of the cross your sins are forgiven.

You hear the Word of the Theology of the Cross read in the Epistle Reading and you understand and trust that *"we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

It is in the cross that God wants to be known and where He reveals Himself for our good. Listen to His Word that feeds your soul and listen for the cross as He says, "Take and eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you. Take and drink, this is My Blood of the new testament which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The Theology of the Cross declares to us that it is through weakness and pain and suffering that God comes to us most clearly, first in His cross and then in the midst of our increasing weaknesses and experiences of suffering. That gives a whole new perspective then to what God has allowed and what He does allow, and it grants us purpose even when life seems cruel and unfair. This is the

theology and doctrine and dogma that enable Joseph, not only to endure, but also to forgive and witness to the good God Who works all things ultimately to accomplish His purpose.

Permit me to give you a real-life example of what I am talking about. Rev. Richard Eyer is a hospital chaplain in Wisconsin. He writes of this episode.

"Mr Wittl had asked for a visit from the hospital chaplain before surgery. Arriving at his room, I found him sitting in the chair beside his bed, trembling at the thought of cardiac bypass surgery the next morning. Hardened, not by temperament but by manual labor, he said little but asked me to pray with him. We prayed that all would go smoothly."

"That was nearly two months ago, and Mr. Wittl is still a patient in our intensive care unit. He is alert, but he is respirator dependent and requires kidney dialysis several times a week. Seemingly, our prayer for a smooth recovery without complications had gone away."

"What is remarkable about Mr. Wittl, however, is his simple yet enduring faith in God. Although he has not been able to speak for nearly two months because of the respirator, he asks me each day (through hand signals) to pray with him. I do. We daily ask for faith to entrust to God all that comes that day. We also pray for the will of God to be done."

"Each time we pray, Mr. Wittl struggles to raise his hand to make the sign of the cross on his head and heart. This sign of the cross is no perfunctory ritual for Mr. Wittl; he knows it is the cross that lies at the heart of one's confidence in the Lord."

"Mr. Wittl has a daughter. As we frequently stand together at the bedside, I often feel weary, frustrated, and empathetic toward Mr. Wittl's sufferings; but his daughter is all smiles and lighthearted, reassuring her father that all will be well and that God will heal him. 'There is nothing to worry about,' she says. But somehow her father doesn't seem comforted by this and turns to me to make the sign of the cross. Unlike her father, Mr. Wittl's daughter subscribes to a common misunderstanding of faith. She believes that her father will be healed, and she believes that faith is the way to health" (*"Pastoral Care under the Cross,"* Rev. Richard C. Eyer, pages 25-26).

You see, dear people, there was no place for weakness and suffering in her understanding of what God has permitted and what His plan is. But Mr. Wittl could sing, even at that point, "Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord to Thee," confident that the Lord is with him always, even to the end of the age and that God will never leave him nor forsake him. Meanwhile, Mr. Wittl's daughter is trying exert her will over against what God is permitting to take place. She is using the power of positive thinking, pop-psychology, self-affirmation, hype-slogans and the hopeless hope of instant gratification. She will be devastated by her father's death and she will not have that peace which passes all understanding.

The Theology of the Cross, where God has mercifully and graciously revealed Himself and wants to be trusted, enables Emily Naher here at Our Redeemer to commend herself into the hands of the Lord as she continues to suffer the effects of lymphoma and thus she prays, "Tonight, Lord?"

It enabled the Apostle Paul to hear the Lord say, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9) and to believe and say in response, "*I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ,*

*then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). This truth enabled Job to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15) and allowed Joseph to tell his brothers, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. Amen.*