

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9, 2022 – LENTEN MIDWEEK #2 – GENESIS 37:12-36

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. (Gen. 37:31-35 ESV). Thus far our text.

Does it sometimes seem like God just doesn't care? We have something that's bothering us, maybe of a serious nature, and we pray and pray to Him, and we don't receive an answer. Has He left us alone? Is He just ignoring our prayers? We know from Luther's Small Catechism that God answers all prayers of all believers, even if the response to them is a "No" instead of the "Yes" we're hoping for. Or, maybe more maddeningly, He might answer with a "Not yet." In these instances, the silence can seem to be deafening. Even though we know better, we can still fall into the thinking that we're all alone to deal with the problems of this life – this can be discouraging, depressing and disheartening to us, especially if we're dealing with something that we think is crucial or life-threatening.

Have you ever sat in a completely silent house, with no TV on, no radio playing, no one talking, and marveled at the things that you can hear? The refrigerator turning off and on; the floors creaking; the furnace turning off and on; the wind blowing the tree limbs outside...all of these can be deafening, and distracting, and even a bit scary to us, that are used to always having some background noise. I

actually took a car to the shop once for a noise that was driving me crazy – a squeak or creak from somewhere. When the mechanic couldn't find it, his instruction to me was to turn the radio a little bit louder, so it didn't bother me anymore! However, when the silence seems to come from God, it's even more profound and deep. We can think that He doesn't care about our trifles in this life; we can start thinking that the only things we should pray to Him about are the "major" things, and the smaller things in life, well, we shouldn't "bother" Him with them. This couldn't be further from the truth, but we definitely start thinking on these lines.

In our text from Genesis, it seemed in the life of Joseph that God wasn't answering to the horrible events that were taking place. Joseph's brothers were so treacherous, that they were competing with each other to commit more and more depraved sins against their brother, and their father. They at first were going to kill him because of their jealousy toward him – they didn't like the fact that their father lavished him with gifts that they themselves didn't receive. They allowed themselves to burn with anger to the point that they became murderous in their desires. God didn't put a stop to them beating him, placing him in a well, and doing everything but beat him to death. When they came up with a different plan, to sell him into slavery, both to profit from Joseph's disappearance, and to "save face" with their father, Jacob, again God didn't seem to stop them. The silence from heaven was deafening. He didn't reach down from on high, strike them dead, and rescue Joseph. No, He allowed the dastardly deeds to continue. Joseph could have been led to the point of despair, for thinking that the Triune God didn't care about what was happening to him. The brothers were emboldened that what they were doing was justified by the silence and lack of action from on high.

Now, with 20/20 hindsight, we know the end of the narrative – God allowed this to happen for the purpose of saving many lives from the upcoming famine. God allowed this to happen so that Joseph would be in a position of authority, to be their "man in Havana (or Egypt)" when the time came for their need to be satisfied. He gave Joseph a forgiving heart, so that when his brothers came to him later for

food, and Joseph was in a position to save them from starvation, he didn't hesitate to help them. God really wasn't silent or unfeeling or not listening; rather, His answer wasn't what Joseph, or we reading today, expected Him to do and say. Sometimes God's silence isn't really so quiet; rather, He knows better than we do what the proper response is for the particular time and place. His knowledge is greater than ours; He always has our best interests in mind; even when we doubt Him, He never wavers in His support and love for us His children. He never abandoned Joseph; rather, as Joseph says it well in Chapter 50, which we'll get to later on in this Lenten series on Good Friday, the brothers intended their actions for evil, but God intended them for good, the saving of many lives. I'll delve into this in greater detail then, but we need to visit it here a little – God's silence isn't really all that silent – sometimes it's intended to quiet us, rather than make us think that we are all alone.

God often specializes in silence, that which is strange to us, rather than being bombastic and noticeable. Remember when Elijah was experiencing the presence of God – when Elijah was doubting whether God cared or not about him and his plight? God sent a loud windstorm, an earthquake, a fire, all sorts of loud and attention-seeking events – but He wasn't present in them. Rather, He was in the gentle whisper that followed. There were many times when Jesus went away by Himself to pray, to recollect Himself, to focus on the ongoing conversation of prayer that He needed between Himself and the Father. When Jesus gives us direction as to how to pray, He directs us not to be noticed by our many words, or by praying outlandishly in the marketplaces and on the street corners, but to go into our room, shut the door, and pray to our Father, Who is in secret. We don't need to make a show out of praying; it's a private conversation between us and God. He comes to us, and answers our prayers, and reassures us of His presence, softly and tenderly ministering to us.

Chiefly, Jesus chose to answer with silence to Pilate, when the secular leader demanded that He speak up for Himself, that He give an answer to the false charges that the religious leaders were spewing at Him. He could have responded with a cry for the legions of angels in heaven to come and rescue Him,

and they would have come without delay. But, this wouldn't have accomplished His mission, the saving of many lives. He didn't speak out or cry to God to save Him from the beatings, from the scourging, from the agony and bloody pain that He underwent for us and our salvation. He didn't cry out from the cross for the Father to rescue Him from this horrible hour. He suffered in silence, because He knew that it was necessary. Not that this made it any easier; in fact, His silence was often interpreted as defiance by the brutal soldiers and military, and made them sadistically punish His body all the more. But, the silence that He maintained was in keeping with the predictions of the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah prophesied that the Lamb that was led to the slaughter would open not His mouth, even though He was pressed on all sides. He would go willingly to the cross, scorning its shame, not protesting His travel there. He wouldn't cry out and curse those who beat Him; instead, He would pray for the Father to forgive them, because they didn't know what they were doing. They were killing the Lord of Life; but they thought they were killing a blasphemer, One that thought that He was the Holy One of God.

As we'll see through this series of sermons, so many events and attitudes and characteristics of Joseph also apply to Jesus. We can consider Joseph to be a type of Christ, one that points ahead to Him, that instructs us what Jesus was going to be like and what He was going to do in His earthly life. Joseph was not perfect; indeed, he was a sinful man; however, he was given faith to believe that God's blessing and provision in his life would not waver or fade. Joseph certainly had plenty of opportunities to doubt – after all, he was sold into slavery only when his brothers, the ones that were supposed to be his allies, decided that there was more to be gained by enslaving him than killing him. Joseph would have certainly had the right to complain to God that He was being silent when Joseph was in need; why would God abandon him so? But, Joseph was given the depth of faith and the maturity of judgment to see that God's silence was in keeping with His perfect plan, which was to save many lives through the injustice of what was happening to Joseph.

In our lives, we pray that God would give us this depth of insight and ability to see through the events that we are going through, to His perfect plan that is being enacted in our very midst. Even though we might think that God doesn't care about us, that He's got better things to do than to worry about us lowly creatures, this couldn't be further from the truth. He just sometimes does things in ways that are foreign to us, that don't make sense to us. He was silent throughout His suffering and Passion, not because He didn't have the ability to speak out, but because He knew that there was a greater purpose to be performed by the events being carried out to the conclusion that they were. He knows that sometimes remaining silent when we ask Him for something will teach us that there are some things that would be valuable for us not to have, so that we think that we can somehow survive without Him in our lives. We don't want to be driven to the point of being arrogant, and somehow thinking that we are in any way, shape, or form responsible for our own salvation. And, His silence often serves the greater purpose of making us rely on Him ever more strongly for everything that we need to support this body and life. When He doesn't answer in the way in which we desire, we must ask ourselves if it's His reaction, or our expectation, that are faulty. Since there is no sin, no error, in God, then our request must be the problem in the moment, when we are blinded by our pain.

It's hard to see clearly when we're going through a particular trouble. Sometimes the pain and agony are all that we can see in the moment – after all, it characterizes every aspect of our daily lives. We don't think that there is any end in sight; we can't imagine a day when the pain will end, and we will be removed from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. And, we can't fathom that there may be an end to the earthly suffering even before that point, brought to us by God's love and His mercy and grace. But, He has a perspective that we don't have – thanks be to God that He does. Silence doesn't mean we're abandoned; rather, silence sometimes allows us to reflect, take time out for prayer, and gain a perspective that our modern, cacophonous world doesn't always allow.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.