

## **SERIES C: The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany**

February 20, 2022

Genesis 45:3–15

### **God's Master Plan**

In one of my recent visits to BC, my nieces, nephew, and I went to an indoor trampoline park in New Westminster. One of the games we decided to play was an old Filipino game called *Patintero*. It's like the game tag but instead of tagger who is "It" that tries to tag everyone out, there is an equal number of taggers and runners.

The objective of the game for the runners is to get as many of their team mates across the battle lines to the end and then back home again to where they first started. Each runner who is able to return home merits one point for their team.

After all the runners have been tagged, then the teams switch positions: taggers become runners and vice versa. At the end, whichever team has the most points wins.

There is an unwritten plan for the runners: one survivor is better than no survivors. So oftentimes, runners are in situations where one of them needs to be the distraction or the "sacrificial lamb" so that at least their teammate can pass through a battle line and return home to get a point for them.

Joseph and his brothers were united as team. Instead of lovingly sacrificing their own selves for the good of their brothers, they wanted to sacrifice Joseph to their hatred, jealousy, and anger.

Even so during their lives, God included them in his master plan. A plan from eternity. In time, the lines of the plan were unfolding even after the Fall of Adam.

Part of that plan we saw in our OT reading. Joseph is before his brothers, who fled starvation from the distant land of Canaan to buy bread that their families may live. Joseph tests his brothers, who had wanted to murder him when he was a boy but was deterred from that scheme by their eldest brother, Reuben.

Still, Joseph was in agony over the evil he experienced in the world by his own family, who sold him to their distant cousins, the Ishmaelites—the descendants of their grandfather Isaac's older brother, Ishmael—the son of an Egyptian woman.

The agony you feel in these two years of pandemic and governmental measures is like Joseph's own agony when he was in a place in God's master plan that showed the evil in the world, even among family members, rather than the good in the world that God still provides—the kindness and love of family.

You may have brothers, sisters, or friends that quarrel with you over your own personal view point of the pandemic and government measures, or the recent event at Ottawa with the Freedom Convoy.

You may even have family or friends that disown you like Joseph's brothers disowned him—they no longer saw him as a brother, someone who is to be the object of their love, rather they saw him as an object of their deadly anger.

Before our text when Joseph manifests who he really is to his brothers, Joseph wept so loudly before his brothers that Pharaoh's servants could hear him. Why did Joseph weep?

Let's go back further in time in God's master plan. His brothers had all torn their cloths as a sign of mourning when Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack and then they returned to the city.

Then Judah and his brothers are seen in Joseph's house. There they fulfill Joseph's dream, which fanned the flame of jealousy and anger towards him, and they fell before him bowing in his presence.

Judah speaks to the lord of the land and tells him of the pledge he made to his aged father to let Benjamin go with them to Egypt to free their brother, Simeon, from prison. Judah, the one who schemed and convinced his brothers to sell Joseph to their distant cousins, now appeals to him in a matter of life and death—Judah would exchange his life for the boy.

What contrasts of experience between Joseph and Benjamin! His brother who lashed out with jealousy and anger, now desired to exchange his life for Benjamin—their half-brother, Joseph's full brother.

Only if our family and friends in church and outside of church could treat us and one another in such a merciful way, to show us kindness and love! And if only we could treat our neighbours in church and those out of church in such a way.

They way of Christ: to respond with love to our enemies, to bless our cursers, and pray for our abusers. To really desire that they repent in the knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and the first fruit of the new creation.

That shows God's kingdom among us, when we walk in the way of Christ not expecting any good from our neighbours. To those who hurl insults, violence, deprivation of livelihood, and relationships, we are called to take up our cross and follow our Lord Jesus on his path of mercy and love that led him to the cross for you and me.

By his body and blood in the bread and wine, Christ's makes his appeal to his Father for your benefit and good: to forgive you and strengthen you to trust in God who is still in control over the affairs of this broken universe.

In response to Judah's appeal, Joseph wept. Perhaps by his tears and weeping his brothers would get a glimmer of who the lord of the land really was. The last image of Joseph as boy may have been him weeping as he was taken to slavery in Egypt.

Why did Joseph weep? His brothers manifested themselves, through Joseph's testing, that they are repentant and his true brothers, not only physically but spiritually as well. At this recognition, Joseph cried tears of joy.

His brothers, however, were still in the dark. So Joseph, finally manifests his identity to them, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

His brothers were speechless and out of their minds, not in joy but in fear. The coincidences in their interactions with Joseph is clear in their minds like Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack—it was part of Joseph's plan.

His brothers still left in the dark concerning Joseph's heart for them, interpret his tears and loud weeping to mean the sign of their betrayal and the start of Joseph's bitter revenge against his brothers who hated and abused him as a boy.

This is the way of satan: to get revenge against those who break love and unity with us and hurl evil against us, rather than to let the injustice be in God's hands and to pray for the eternal good of our enemies.

Joseph is an example of a person walking in the way of Christ. He manifests his heart's intent, tenderly, kindly inviting them "Come near to me, please." Once near to him, he says to them, "I am *your* brother, Joseph, *whom you sold into Egypt*." Finally, all is clear and manifest. This lord of the land *is* Joseph, their brother—the *one they sold into Egypt*.

While his brothers are speechless, Joseph's speaks for them. Their shame and guilt over the years found no words and they had no strength to speak them. What his brothers aren't able to do, Joseph confesses their guilt for them as their representative in the breach before God's coming judgment.

Then they see a portion of God's master plan in their lives. Joseph comforts them saying, "now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."

Joseph had forgiven his brothers, they were to no longer carry the guilt, shame, and anger against themselves for what they had done. All is forgiven. God's master plan even included their evil actions, which he turns for good that their families would live through the great famine and a remnant of the Messiah's line would be preserved.

God's master plan includes you, and the evil that satan, the world, and your sinful flesh thrust and strikes your life and all you possess, even your close relationships. Like the Filipino game of *Patintero*, God master plan includes a one sufficient sacrifice for the good of the world.

Through baptism, God has called you into his holy team. The necessary sacrifice of victory has been won by Christ on the cross. And the lines of God's master plan for your life and mine is still unfolding.

Yet, God shows us the final lines of his master plan to encourage and strengthen your trust in him who turns the evil you endure into good as you continue walking in the way of Christ with mercy and love.

God shows you the final lines of his plan that you may endure evil and agony for the sake of Christ and the spread and growth of his kingdom of grace and glory.

The final lines show us this: Agony and injustice gives way as our Lord raises your body and unites your soul with it to imperishable glory with great reward in the restored universe. Amen.