

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 37:1-11

Everything changes when your Brother dies

For many, being brothers is a love-hate relationship. You pick on each other relentlessly, but if someone else picks on your brother, well, you just don't do that. There's times you can't wait to get away from each other, but, when push comes to shove, there are few things you wouldn't do for each other. It's an odd thing, being brothers.

I know that's the case with my brother. I don't think anyone drove me crazier growing up than him, and I wouldn't doubt that no one tormented him more than I did. When we were lucky, we fought with words, and, even then, it was, and sometimes still is, ugly. There are times, sad to say, I've just wanted to kill him.

And that's the funny thing. Last year he died, literally died. They brought him back, thank God, but he died, and then he almost died a few times more, and there is still a good chance that something could happen and he could die. And all the punches, the angry words, the frustrations and annoyances, well, they were forgotten. I was in the car down to Columbus, and as He lay unconscious, I begged him not to die, even as I begged God not to let him die, and I said things to him I'll probably never tell him when he's awake. He's my brother, after all. I love him, but, you know, we're not chicks.

The Bible is full of stories about brothers: Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Aaron and Moses, Jesse's seven sons and David, James and John, and the list goes on. Sometimes brothers get along. Sometimes they don't. But there is nothing like a brother.

Today we see the beginning of the long story in Genesis of Joseph and his brothers. It's an amazing story. I can't tell it all now. Joseph is hated by his brothers, sold into slavery by his brothers, and then, when he rises to power in Egypt, forgives his brothers, feeds them and gives them a home. It is a heart-wrenching story. It is one of the most moving in all of Scripture. Today is the opening scene.

Joseph drove his brothers crazy. He was the favorite, and it doesn't even seem like his father tried to hide it. *"This is my son, whom I love,"* Jacob's actions made plain. He doted on Joseph, gave him a special robe. This was the son of Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife. This was the son of Jacob's old age. This was his faithful son, with clear gifts and a bright future. We all can see why that would grate on his brothers, but it wasn't Joseph's fault. It was who he was, who he was born and who he would be, and not simply by Jacob's design, but by God's.

What a peaceful place the Patriarch's house must have been! Two of his wives at each other's throat and twelve sons, there's a recipe for a good night's sleep. You think you've got headaches? You think you have family issues? Genesis reminds us you're hardly the first. Experience tells us you won't be the last. Beware, those of you who think you or your family are too much of a wreck for God. God is like one of those modern artists who turns scrap metal into art. God has endured, and even pardoned, such people in the past, and He's not about to stop doing so now.

Joseph was a man chosen by God. His dream reinforced that fact. From his birth, he had a destiny like few others. He would endure countless hardships, hardships that would crush most of us, but God would bring him through them, and, in the end, his brothers, who were also his worst enemies, would bow down to him, not, as we find out, in the begrudging surrender of defeat, but in the forgiven joy of those who have been delivered by the very one they'd betrayed.

When you read about Joseph, you can't help but think about Christ. He too was a special Child, loved by His Father above all else. He too was the chosen Son with clear gifts and a bright future, with a destiny that would bring Him through many hardships, hardships that would crush the rest of us, to resurrected glory. And He too would have His brothers, the very same brothers who'd betrayed Him, even put Him to death, bow down to Him, not in the begrudging surrender of defeat, but in the forgiven joy of those who have been delivered by the very one they'd once opposed.

Think of the Passion readings of the past three Wednesdays. Keep these words in mind as you hear the Passion readings to come. Don't you hear an echo: *"His brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."*

And you've been the brothers, as have I. We've all by nature hated Him for who He is and what He says. His words have burned, turned our face red. We've been jealous of the Father's love for Him and for His unique place in history. "Who are you?" we've asked. "Who are you to tell me what to do or not to do? Who are you to set yourself up as some authority? Who are you to tell me what God plans and wants and has done?" We've all torn off His robe, and, even worse, we've all put Him on His cross by our disobedience, by our rebellion, by our refusal to see in Him our deliverance, our hope, our future.

Lent is to Jesus what Egypt was to Joseph. Now we see Him face obstacle after obstacle: false accusations, hollow praise, betrayal, and imprisonment. We see the great one humbled, brought down a notch, seemingly destroyed, good as dead and done with. But then something unexpected happens. The lilies grow. Spring comes. And, all of a sudden, our Brother is at the right hand of power. Our Brother is in charge. Our Brother stands between us and death or life. Our Brother, betrayed by our hands, holds our future in his.

"And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.'"

It all boils down to brothers. What will He do? What does He do, this Brother betrayed by brothers who now holds the brothers' lives in His hands? St. Paul tells us, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

How can that be? Because Jesus does what brothers do, even when they bear the scars of their brother's hatred: He forgives. He uses all that God has made Him and given Him, all that He has earned and won by His hard work and suffering, not for Himself, but for

us. He feeds us with His Body and Blood in the midst of the spiritual famine that is this world. He gives us a home. He promises us a future, even life everlasting. That is your Brother's love for you, even though you've not loved Him as you ought.

So how can you not now love Him now, love Him more than ever before, and how can you not now love one another? We are brothers. We are His brothers. You now wear His robe. You are dressed as a saint, the Father's beloved sons. You are the one with clear Gifts and a bright future, all because of Him, because of your Brother, Jesus Christ.

Everything changes when your Brother dies. Everything. You change. And would you have it any other way? Remember that as we walk deeper into Lent in the days to come. Everything changes when your Brother dies. Everything. Amen.