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Genesis 50:15-21

Have you ever thought about the Biblical stories we teach our children, treating them as cute tales featuring juicy red apples, elephants on a boat, and a coat of many colors?

But as an adult, you look back and realize just how dark...and adult they really are.

Adam and Eve can become a story that brings shame to sexuality and sees women as the cause of all problems.

Noah's ark is full of death and destruction, putting the idea into our head that if God did it before, God could and would do it again.

Then Joseph, with his colorful coat. But if we really look at his story, we see it's about abuse, dysfunction, generational trauma.

First, there's Joseph's Father, Jacob. If you recall, Jacob tricked his brother into selling his birthright and fooled his Dad into receiving the blessing.

Abuse and deception have become part of the family, so when Jacob has his own kids, this behavior is passed down.

He treats Joseph as the favored son, giving him a one-of-a-kind coat.

The brothers assault Joseph, strip him of his clothes, toss him down a well, sell him into slavery.

They lie to their father, leading him to believe Joseph was eaten by an animal.

The painful irony that Jacob, who tricked his brother and fooled his father, is now the one being lied to by his own sons.

Joseph becomes a servant who is sexually assaulted, accused of rape, and thrown into jail.

Meanwhile his family back home endures harsh times and homelessness, a great famine and Dad thinking his son is gone.

Does this sound like a cute kid's story to you? It is very adult.

But as we discover, Joseph has the gifts of dreams, leadership, and wise stewardship.

He rises in ranks to become the second most powerful person in Egypt, and when his family finds their way to him, Joseph has the power and authority to do with them whatever he wants.

At first, the resentment comes to the surface, and Joseph does cause them to worry.

But then, but then...in chapter 45, we see Joseph, who had been so mistreated by his brothers, who underwent so much unnecessary pain and suffering...

He cries out; he weeps. He invites his brothers to come closer. He says-

“Do not be distressed; do not be angry at yourself. God has been active in my life.”

Joseph, who had every right to retribution, says to the ones who hurt him-

“Come join me. Let us be a family again. Settle in this land and I will make sure you are OK.”

Joseph could have continued the family history of trickery, deception, and abuse.

But that would have been a dead end, with no room for blessings.

Instead he chooses grace; he chooses life.

And the family reunites. Jacob with his children; Joseph with his siblings, and they survive and thrive in the land...

BUT...but, the story does not end there, because the legacy of dysfunction can be long term.

Sometimes the issues of unresolved guilt and shame have a way of not letting go.

As we hear in today's reading, it is years and years later. Jacob has died.

And the brothers who stripped Joseph and sold him into slavery are afraid that he will now go after them.

They are so used to the hurt and harm; they are so racked with their own feelings of what they have done wrong, that they assume the worst.

Their guilt; their regret is so great that they can't even comprehend that they could be forgiven.

So the brothers go to Joseph with another lie, hoping he won't pay them back for all they've done.

And what does Joseph, the 2nd most powerful person in all the land do?

He wept.

In Hebrew, the word for “wept” suggests that a person is crying so hard that it is a fully body experience starting from the feet, up through the stomach.

When we're told Joseph wept, we are to think of the kind of crying that is heavy, deep, heaving.

Here Joseph is, with brothers who assume he will hurt them.

And Joseph weeps.

Joseph could've killed them; instead, he chose to be kind.

His brothers also weep and offer to be his servants.

What he does next is astounding. Joseph says- "Do not be afraid."

"Even though you hurt me, and you hurt me really, really bad, I will take care of you, I will be there for you, I will make sure your family is safe."

In doing so, Joseph is saying "No" to "chaos" and "yes" to "comfort."

In doing so, Joseph says "no" to dysfunction and "yes" to healthy living.

In doing so, Joseph brings forth the reality for more life, good life, a life to be shared by the whole family, as a team, as one.

But please note this- Joseph is not being dismissive of the wrong they have done.

Joseph does not deny that they did some really hurtful things to him and one another.

He names it.

He claims it.

He creates space for it.

Joseph does not allow their behaviors to have a hold on him, or to have power over them anymore.

Joseph speaks about what they have done and then he finds a way to give it over, give it to God, and to welcome in the healing experience of grace and mercy.

Joseph embodies the Good News centuries before we even knew what the Good News was.

Joseph is an example of how we can choose to still walk in the cool breeze of the afternoon even when there have been many tragic mistakes.

Joseph is an example of how we can choose to be the ones who scatter seeds of goodness and grace, mercy, and life.

Joseph is an example of how we can bring the starry sky to those who are sitting in the darkness of shame, guilt, and fear.

As stated in the beginning, some of the stories we teach our children are dark and very adult.

But when taught right, they can create a solid foundation in how to persevere through tough times, how to move beyond generational pain, and how we each have the ability to restore relationships.

And when we do those things, when we allow grace and mercy, we are allowing God to move into our beings, into our stories, and to further sow the seeds of goodness and more life.

For that, we can say “Amen.”