



Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
February 20, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

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

Growing up in California, every holiday brought the gift of Sees Candy. Mint truffles, milk chocolate covered peanut clusters, coconut creams, brown sugar squares, vanilla buttercreams, and so many other soft centered wonders. A pound of See's Candy now sells for \$26.00. So they are a treasured gift I do not take lightly. A family here at Ascension purchased my last pound of Sees Candy. It was left in my mailbox in the hallway. What a surprise! What a gift! If you are familiar with the character Gollum from Lord of the Rings, when he found his long sought-after ring, he called the ring "my precious." When See's candy falls into my possession, I too can be heard treasuring each piece of candy as "my precious." So imagine my surprise when I made the difficult decision to bring the precious pound of chocolates home to share with my family, only to find that they do not value the precious chocolates as much as I do. I brought the box home after eating only two pieces. Remember that – two pieces. I left to pick up my son at his job. When I came home, the box was half empty. Not terrible...I could not eat them all anyways. But to my deep shock and devastation, when I picked up the next piece of candy to pop it in my mouth – I discovered, to my horror, a finger size hole punched in the bottom. My wife and two daughters took it upon themselves to test out each piece of candy to determine whether or not they wanted to eat it. Every single piece of glorious candy left in the box had been desecrated – broken and mutilated. After an earth-shattering scream of agony, I went on the hunt for the defilers. Vengeance was going to be mine.

Today we hear a very different story in the book of Genesis. The story of Joseph and his brothers. We pick up the story towards its end. Where Joseph meets his brothers in the Pharaoh's court where Joseph is in charge and his brothers arrive begging for their lives. Joseph could have ended them. Instead, we hear Joseph speak these words.

"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."

"The last time that Joseph laid eyes on his brothers," writes Father Rick Morley, "they had just beaten him to a bloody pulp, thrown him into a pit, and then sold him off as a slave to some passing Ishmaelites. Now, Joseph is the most important person in all of Egypt, save for Pharaoh himself. He could crush his brothers. He could torture them. He could really teach them a lesson. Instead, he tells them not to worry, it wasn't them who did all that to him, it was God who sent Joseph to Egypt.

What faith it takes to utter such words. I'm not sure I could be so dutiful to God's plan.

Joseph is able to look upon the hardest days of his life and see the hand of God working for himself and all of God's people. He's able to look upon the awful experience of being betrayed by family, sold as a slave, and subsequently exploited and plunged into jail – as God moving mightily to save God's people and all the people of that corner of the world from famine. Honestly, my first thought would have been to ask God, "Wasn't there an easier way?" Couldn't we have just postponed the famine? Or have Joseph send his resume to Pharaoh after he had his troubling dreams? Did it really take all of that? Under the worst of circumstances and the most extreme temptation, Joseph was faithful to God.

What has been your Joseph moment? And yes, I would very much like to know the moment when you realized that what you believed to be the very worst moment in your life, God used to create life. However, before you share that moment – tell me of your Jacob moment – the moment you believed your life was over. Jacob was Joseph's father. And the story of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt begins like this– when the brothers conspired against Joseph – they sold him to some traders. They took Joseph's long robe with sleeves, dipped the robe in animal's blood and took it to their father Jacob who believed a wild animal had devoured his youngest son, Joseph. Tell me of your Jacob moment - When everything came crashing down – when the



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ground fell out from under you – when the walls collapsed in on you – when the world was preparing to offer your story a period and then God offered you a comma instead. Tell me of that moment – because that is the moment most of us can summon more quickly to our memory. When the last breath of someone we have loved is exhaled. When the words said in anger become the last words spoken. When the person you have loved deeply in this life walks out of your life. When the friendship ends in betrayal. When the sorrow you feel consumes you and everything you can see. Yes – tell me of your Joseph moment when God reveals life into your world. For that is worthy of praise. But first, tell me of your Jacob moment – when your sorrow brought you to your knees and you could not get up without help.

“Is there a cure for sorrow?” writes author Jan Richardson. “At its deepest, grief can make it difficult to believe that we will ever be whole again, that we will ever know joy again, or that hope will ever visit us again. It can leave us believing we will feel this way forever. Yet grief holds strange graces that make it possible to enter into the wholeness that God continually desires for us, even as we continue to live with the pain of our loss. If there is any cure for sorrow, the cure will not look like we expect. We often think of a cure as a return to a condition we have once known – that it repairs us in a way that leaves us recognizable to ourselves and others. The reality of grief is that the breakage it brings will not allow us to be put back together in the same way. Our life will never look like it did before sorrow arrived.

Yet there is healing that comes in our grieving, a redemption that does something other than restore us to the lives we once knew. This healing comes...in allowing ourselves to give exquisite attention to our grief – to feel it in its terrible fullness instead of ignoring it, to let it speak instead of silencing it, and to allow it to show us a way that we could not find on our own. Part of the strange mystery of grief is that it holds its own cure. We grieve because we have lost a beloved connection to another person or to a way of being in this world. As we tend the connections that remain, our connection to others, including our beloved dead; our connection to God, even when we feel fury at God for allowing such loss; and our connection to the layers of our own hearts – a wholeness steals in that has the ability to make a home in us even when we still feel broken.

It can sometimes seem our grief is all that connects us to what we have lost. This gives [our grief] a perilous potency that can threaten the life that seeks to unfold in us – a life capable of holding both love and sorrow. If we allow grief to do its work, the love that lives within it becomes ever more clear and present to us. In time, the love has a way of overtaking the grief, so that our loving, rather than our grieving, becomes our primary bond to what we have lost. It is, finally, this love that holds our cure. It is this love that is our cure. In the deepest pain that [breaks] us, in the keenest solace that visits us, in the hope that does not release its hold on us, love lives, bearing itself toward us as sorrow’s most lasting cure.

But I say to you that listen, love. Love is the cure for our enemies. Love is the cure for those who curse us. Love is the cure for those who abuse us and when we abuse ourselves. Love is the cure for every pain, for every suffering, for every hurt – the love of God lives in us and through us. For brothers who betray. For sisters who shy away. For a world hungry to be made whole once again. This is where the healing begins – where the resurrection power of our God is revealed. Thanks be to God!. Amen.