

God's Promise – part 2

I've been thinking a lot this week about this business of God's promise. We talked about it last week. The video does a good job of tracing that promise.

As Christians, our promise isn't for land or a nation. The coming of Christ brought us into something new – the realm of God...kingdom of God. In that realm of God, there is no such thing as lands and borders.

But as we said last week, we do inherit that same blessing Abraham got – for the same reason. So that through us, all the families in the world would be blessed. God's promise for us is the blessing of life...abundant life. God's promise is a new citizenship in the realm of God.

And in that realm of God, God's promise of abundant life is intended for everyone.

So, let's go back to today's reading. Joseph's brothers did him wrong...and they hurt their father too.. They were determined to get rid of Joseph. They didn't much care what happened to him after they sold him, as long as he was out of their lives.

But while Joseph was in prison in Egypt, Pharaoh learns that he has some killer dream interpretation skills.

Pharaoh has a strange dream about seven fat cows and seven skinny, starving cows. Joseph correctly predicts that the dream means there will be seven years of fabulous crop yields followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph is put in charge of everything during the seven years of plenty. Under his direction, the Egyptians build storage bins and store massive quantities of grain and olive oil and all the staples of middle east life.

When famine hits, they're ready. Meanwhile, back on Israel's farm in Canaan, they weren't ready. They're starving. They hear there's food in Egypt and Joseph's ten older brothers pack up and head there to get food, not knowing their brother was the mastermind behind Egypt's fortune.

So, as the video says, the brother's evil ends up being their salvation. If Joseph hadn't wound up in Egypt, God's promise may have died along with Israel's family. What the brothers intended for harm, God used for good...to keep the family of Israel...and the promise...alive

God didn't cause the brothers to sell Joseph. But God was able to transform their evil into good. That's how God keeps this promise alive. It still is. When bad stuff is going down, we can trust that God still intends to keep the promise of life.

God does so by transforming evil to good. The most profound example is of course the death of Jesus Christ. The cross was as evil as it got. The Romans and the Jewish religious leaders intended great harm for Jesus – they intended his death.

Instead, when God raised Jesus from the dead, God used the cross to defeat evil and death. That defeat continues to unfold. God's promise is that that work will one day be complete, heaven and earth will be one, and the triune God will fully reign over heaven and earth.

So here's what I've been thinking about this promise in light of what's going on now. I think a lot of us just want to go back to the way things were before the pandemic. We might even think that that's what God's promise of life means in this situation – that we'll get our old lives back.

But here's the thing, that old life didn't really always fit the kingdom of God image Jesus taught, did it?

We are sorely tempted to believe God's promise has to do with prosperity and even wealth. We may equate God's promise with the American dream. We think abundant life means abundant possessions and the ability to go anywhere and do anything we want. We may somehow even link God's promise of life with our nation itself.

But you know what? An awful lot of the way this country is bears no resemblance to the kingdom of

What if the life we so desperately want to get back isn't the life God wants for us? What if we have settled for something that is far less wonderful than what God does want for us?

What if the American Dream, at least as it has too often played out, is almost the opposite of God's promise?

What if God is using the turmoil of our present time to break our illusion that the American Dream is equivalent to God's promise and make the actual promise more of a reality?

What would that look like?

How might God be transforming us in all this?

And are we willing to let God do the work of using our present pain to transform us?

Because here's the thing, transformation is tough, especially for those who have great wealth and power. Nearly 1500 years after Joseph, Jesus will say repeatedly that in the economy of the kingdom of God, the first will be last and the last first. The powerful and mighty will be brought down and the lowly lifted up.

God's promise is definitely not that a tiny fraction of people would be billionaires while others have to stand in line at the food bank.

God's promise is not that powerful people will be given license to make policies that wreak havoc with the lives of the poor, people of color, LGBTQ folks, and others on the margins.

God's promise is not that healing and wellness must depend on your economic and employment status.

We can't change this nation into the kingdom of God by our work – that's God's work. But we are called to work with God to build that kingdom.

I don't know what will come out of this time. I don't know everything God is doing in the midst of this and I don't completely know what God wants us to do. I believe we do get glimpses...glimpses where love of neighbor does actually win the day. Sometimes glimpses of what God wants me to do emerge.

Ultimately, God's promise won't be completely realized until Christ returns and rules over all.

But even now, we can echo with Joseph, in the midst of our pain, God is somehow working for our good.