

From the Book of Genesis: *I am your brother Joseph whom you sold into Egypt.* I speak to you in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN

No one saw this coming... On a dark night outside a small town, a fire started inside the local manufacturing plant. In the blink of an eye it seemed the whole place exploded into flames. The alarm went out to all the volunteer fire departments in the surrounding communities. And they all came as quickly as they could. For you see, this was a beloved manufacturing plant. It was the biggest employer in the area. It was a good corporate citizen. It was a cherished community partner. Naturally, everyone rushed to the scene to try to help. When the first squad appeared, the company president rushed to the fire chief and said, *All of our secret formulas, are in a filing cabinet, in the office in the center of the plant. That filing cabinet must be saved. Now I certainly want you to be safe, of course, but I will give \$100,000 to the fire department that can save that filing cabinet.* Word of this offer spread as more fire departments arrived, but the firefighters were held back by the roaring flames. The last to arrive at the scene was a fire company from a rural township - it was a retirement community. The fire squad was made up entirely of men and women over the age of 70. From a distance, their lone siren was heard as their very old fire truck chugged into sight. To everyone's amazement, the little run-down fire engine passed by all the newer sleek engines parked outside the plant. Their little fire engine drove right past the safety perimeter that was established and then went straight into the middle of the inferno. Outside the other much younger firefighters watched with astonishment as these rather mature firefighters jumped off and began to fight the fire with skill and effort they had never seen before. Within a short time, these folks had single-handedly held back the fire, retrieved the filing cabinet, saved the secret formulas, rescued the local economy, and made their exit. It was nothing short of a miracle. They dismounted their engine to the cheers of the younger firefighters and the crowds that had assembled to watch. The grateful company president joyfully announced that after witnessing this amazing feat he decided to increase the reward to \$200,000, and he walked over to personally thanked each of the brave firefighters. A local TV news reporter rushed in after capturing the event on film and asked, *So - What are you going to do with all that money? Well,* said the 75-year-old fire chief, *the first thing we are going to do is fix the brakes on that old fire truck.*

No one saw this coming - a bad situation turned into a good one. In our reading from Genesis, the brothers who come to Egypt are desperate for food. The brother forced into Egypt is desperate for family. *I am your brother Joseph,* he tells them, *whom you sold into Egypt.* No one saw this coming...

*I am Joseph.* These three words turn everything upside down. As readers of the Book of Genesis we have been anticipating this moment since Chapter 42 and we are now in Chapter 45. *I am Joseph.* These three words turn everything upside down. The brothers, who sold Joseph into slavery assumed he was dead, but now he very much alive, and is, in fact, the Egyptian Official they had been dealing with in order to try to procure grain for their starving family. *I*

*am Joseph.* These three words turn everything upside down. Joseph utters these three words and then kissed each one of his brothers and he weeps over them.

In this moment, Joseph shows us what God is like. Joseph had every reason, and certainly had the power to punish his brothers, to make them pay for the evil that they had done. We do not know how Joseph felt all those years ago about his brothers' betrayal. We do not know what Joseph thought as he endured the suffering of slavery and imprisonment. But what we do know, is that Joseph answers their evil deeds - not with a sense of righteous judgement - not with vengeance - but with forgiveness, mercy and compassion - and in doing so, he shows us the ways of God. *I am Joseph...no one saw this coming.*

Joseph shows us that God can take something evil and make it good. Joseph is able to discern God's loving purpose, he is able to discern God's loving hands at work, weaving things together for good. The English mystic, Julian of Norwich, was also given this gift of discernment. She lived in the last part of the 14th Century and the beginning of the 15th Century. It was the time of the Black Death, the most devastating pandemic in human history. It killed seventy-five million people, 30% of the population of Europe (one in three people). Julian was a benedictine nun and was herself mortally ill when she experienced a series of visions. She somehow miraculously survives and wrote a book about her experience. The book is called *Revelations of Divine Love*. It was the first book written by a woman in the English language. The title says it all. The point that she makes over and over in her writings - is that all is well, every manner of things is and will be well. Now this is not cheery optimism on her part, but a proclamation that God's love is present in and through all things at all times, even in the midst of human tragedy and even in the midst of human suffering. Like Joseph, she could see the pattern of divine love woven into life - bringing forth good. In more recent times, it was the great novelist, Dorothy Sayers, who also possessed this same gift of divine discernment. She once wrote - *God wastes nothing - not even sin. The soul that has struggled and come through is enriched by it's experiences, and Grace does not merely blot out the evil past but in the most literal sense "makes it good."* Think about that in terms of your own life - think about this in terms of the world around us - a life and a world infused with divine love working for good.

Hearing these stories fills me with hope that God's loving purpose for this world will not be stopped. Hearing these stories also forces me to decide, am I going to partner with God in this work or not. Hearing these stories make me wonder if can be like Joseph, and respond to even the worst things imaginable, with a heart for forgiveness, mercy, and compassion - and like Joseph, witness to the amazing and miraculous things that happen when we do. Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind when he calls us to love our enemies. And I assure you when this does actually happen - no one sees it coming - and everyone is blessed.

I speak to you in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN