



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

[Genesis 50:15-21](#)

What is this particular text?

- Petition for mercy
- Story
 - Familial woundedness
 - Reconciliation
- Theology
- Relationship
- “Final chapter” of the familial relationship stories in Genesis

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Concludes the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs
- Sets up the death of Jacob
- Sets the stage for the story of the Exodus
- Introduces theological themes
 - Forgiveness
 - The family whose “messy story” is told in Genesis, finally seems to have its act together
 - Grace – Joseph’s grace foreshadows the Christ
 - Suffering
 - How do we make sense out of it?
 - What does it mean to suffer for others?
 - God’s will and human agency
 - How do they relate?
 - Where does the purpose and intention of God fit with human purpose and intention?
 - Redemption
 - Nothing or no one is beyond saving and restoring

How can this text function in the church today?

- Invitation to reconciliation
- Where/how is God calling us to reconciliation?
- Invitation to have honest conversations about what reconciliation is and what it isn’t
 - What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation
 - When is it good and right to *not* be reconciled
 - Who is responsible for reconciliation?
 - Who sets the terms?
- Invitation for the church to honestly own and name its sins



- Invitation for the church to see itself
 - In the brothers
 - In Joseph

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Gives me hope *and* makes me uncomfortable
 - Hope that God can work even through our failings
 - Discomfort at times when we try to ascribe responsibility to God for the bad things that happen to us
- Encourages me to see experiences in my own life differently
- Fills me with a sense of curiosity how God works in spite of us
- Relief
- Gratitude
- Joy
- Dis-ease
- Wonder
- Tears
 - Of sorrow
 - And hope

What do you have to say to the text?

- Are the brothers “putting words in their father’s mouth?”
- Can this kind of reconciliation really happen?
- What does it take for transformative reconciliation to occur?
- What is the relationship between God’s will and action and human agency and action?
- I’m not sure it was really that easy?
- Is this tying a theological bow on generations of a really messed up family?

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- Family systems
- Hope
- The intertwining of human behavior and God’s intentions
- Myself in the brothers and in Joseph
- Experiences in my own life that time and distance have caused me to see differently

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- Church conflicts
- Woundedness that church people can cause to each other
- Woundedness that people of different ideologies within communities can cause to each other
- Times when the burden of reconciliation is on the one who has been harmed
- Crises of our current time
 - A realization of generational trauma
 - Systemic harm
 - Land acknowledgements and reparations

What do you see within yourself?



- Concrete experiences when God worked through things that were painful to bring about good, not causing the pain but working through it
- How hard it is to be “Joseph”
- Times when I need to be “the brothers”

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Part of the Epilogue of Joseph narrative
 - Began in Genesis 30
 - Ends in Genesis 50
- Final story of the patriarchs
- Final story in a series of dysfunctional family stories
 - Cain and Abel
 - Isaac and Ishmael
 - Jacob and Esau
 - Joseph and his brothers
- Precedes the Exodus narrative

What questions does this text raise for you?

- Did Jacob really give this instruction before he died?
- Are the brothers still manipulating?
- Is it a desire for reconciliation that moves the brothers or fear for their own necks?
- How would Joseph tell this story?
- How would the brothers tell the story?
 - Whose idea was it to tell Joseph that their favor gave instruction to forgive?
 - Do the brothers really understand what they did to Joseph?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- Grudge
- Forgive
 - Hebrew connotes concrete action that lifts off or removes a heavy burden
- God intends
 - *More accurately reads “God weaves”*
- They all weep at reconciliation
- Do not be afraid!
- For good
- God is at work, even when we do horrible things

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- God’s purposes cannot be thwarted
- God works for good
- Forgiveness is restorative
- New beginnings are possible
- The hard work of reconciliation changes things
- Do not be afraid

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- Brokenness is real
- Relationships are fragile



- Real harm does real harm
- Harm creates fear
- Harm robs the present and the future
- Reconciliation is not a given
 - Only the one wronged can forgive
- Wrongdoing against one another changes things forever
 - *Not everything can be fixed*

Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- God is a weaver
- God works for good
- God is still working, creating, restoring even amid our worst actions
- God doesn't give up
- God is present and active in all things

What have others said about this text?

- [“The brothers voice their anxiety.”](#) The ambiguity of their words speaks to the complexity of guilt: “What if Joseph...pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?” (50:15). The first word, *lû*, translated here “what if,” in fact means “if only,” or “would that”—it expresses a wish. Nowhere else in Scripture does this word introduce an outcome that the speaker does not want to happen. We must ask: do the brothers hope for absolution through punishment? If so, what grace is needed to move from the cycle of retaliation and abuse—abuse of self and others—to the place of true forgiveness?” Anthea Portier-Young, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Duke University Divinity School, Durham, N.C.
- [“Joseph’s statement is remarkable](#) for a number of reasons, not the least of which is his willingness to place his brothers’ actions into the realm of God’s work! Joseph recognizes that even though they acted with ill intent, God used those actions for the good. This is indeed a gracious response.” Karla Suomala, Independent Scholar, Richmond, California
- [“Just as the one who is wronged](#) has the power to forgive, the one wronged also has the power to make this kind of theological proclamation. If a sufferer sees divine purposefulness in her or his suffering, we can affirm or at least hear out that declaration. We dare not, however, try explain away another person’s suffering with our own theological speculation; in that case we are as ineffectual and obtuse as Job’s friends.” Cameron B.R. Howard, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota.

What will I teach or proclaim?

- God works for good through all things
- God’s vision is greater than our vision
- Forgiveness cannot be commanded or earned
- Forgiveness changes lives
- God weaves the threads of our lives – good and bad, joyful and sorrowful into something good
- God lifts our heavy burdens, *so that*
 - *We can be restored*
 - *We can be about God’s purposes in the world*
 - *We can be reconciled to God*
 - *We can be reconciled to one another*