

“Our Mother’s Love”

Genesis 50: 51-21, Psalms 103: (1-7)8-13

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Opening prayer:

Eternal Mother, thank you for gathering us here as a family this morning. May your message be a source of encouragement, guidance, and hope for us all. Open our hearts and prepare us to receive your maternal love. We pray all things in your name. What a beautiful name it is.

Amen.

From our reading of Genesis 50, we heard the final moments of Joseph’s family feud. With God’s grace, he was able to forgive his brothers for their wrong doings and live a life with many opened doors. Like Joseph’s family, I am sure that nearly every person in this room has experienced some sort of family dysfunction, or maybe there is one person in your family who never fails to disrupt your peace of mind. Regardless, we tend to love our family and no matter what and without question, God, our

Creator, loves them not matter what, always and unconditionally.

Wether we like it or not, God is always working behind the scenes for those individuals as well. In my story, I was once the disruption within the church that I was attending in my hometown, but not for reasons that were ever my choice. It is never a choice to simply exist.

My memories of church began when I was around five or six years old. Every Sunday morning, I'd watch my mom and dad lead worship. I always admired my mother's voice. At some point, I began paying close attention to the sermons. I didn't understand much of what was going on, but I felt a fire burning deep within my chest, a voice saying, "That should be me at the pulpit. That should be me telling my siblings about our Creator's love." Little Vic didn't know what to make of this.

Years went by; I lost my mother in a car accident just four days after turning 9 years old. Soon after, I was thrown into Catholic Sunday school. The grieving nine-year-old couldn't keep up. I had no attachment to the word of God or the sugar-coated stories that were taught in Sunday school. I eventually told my dad that I didn't want to attend anymore. Though I wanted

to understand God's love, I didn't have the capacity to do so. I wanted to know why everyone was so passionate about God's word, but I didn't have the time. In the midst of my childhood, I had to grow up for those around me, or at least that's what I was made to believe.

Later in my life, I realized that I was queer identifying. At this point, I was at an internal war with myself. I knew that God's love and forgiveness was supposed to be unconditional, but the self-professed Christians around me told me otherwise. Then, I wanted to push God away, because why would I worship a being who denies my ability to love someone, who doesn't quite fit into the heterosexual normality of our world? Or a God who has abundant love for those with addiction, but not the queer person who is in a same-sex relationship? Though I tried to push God away, my faith still had a strong grip on me. I was trying run away with anchors chained to my feet.

It was May of 2018, and I was ending my freshmen year of college. On the morning of the 18th, around 8am, I was getting ready to leave for school when I received a call from a friend saying that there had been a mass shooting in town. Just down the road, eight of my peers and two of my

former substitute teachers had been fatally shot at my high school. For the week following, while my friends and I were grieving and the people of our town were at each other's necks about gun control laws, what was I supposed to do? Turn to God? Trust my faith? ...What else was there to do when no adult was trying to listen to the heartbroken students of Santa Fe, Texas?

These were children and former students who had just experienced the unimaginable. That week, God came to me, and I firmly believe this is when my life was saved. I didn't know who I was crying to, but I was begging for a sign and praying for peace. I was met at rock bottom.

On the first Sunday following the shooting, my family and I decided to visit a new church in our hometown. Other than therapy, it was exactly what I needed at that time. I was surrounded by people who knew my mother, sang with my mother, and loved God just as much as she did. It was a healing experience. I felt like this church was a safe space, and I wanted its community to be my own. I wanted the church family that everyone always talked about. When I was finally comfortable enough to come out publicly, I was abandoned yet again. This was the great disruption. I thought that I had

found my safe space, but I couldn't have been more wrong. In their words,

“[They didn't] have room for [me] anymore.”

In the latter half of the book of Genesis, we see that Joseph's family just doesn't have room for him anymore. We see how Joseph is shunned by nearly all of his siblings. We see how they no longer had room for him at their dining table. In the story, Joseph's father, Jacob, made it known to others that Joseph was the favorite of his children. Jacob even gifted Joseph a flashy new robe to be sure that everyone knew that he was THE golden child. Of course, this led Joseph to become arrogant and self-entitled, believing that the world revolved around him. After all, he was wealthy, handsome, owned a couple of businesses, and received endless amounts of male validation from his father.

Joseph's brothers weren't blind to this behavior between their father and brother. Their jealousy eventually overcame them, and they began plotting Joseph's death. One day, Joseph went searching for his brothers, heading to Dothan. Joseph eventually finds them and as he is approaching, the brothers say to one another, “Here comes that dreamer. Come on now, let's kill him.”

Their plan was to murder Joseph and throw him into a pit, but brother Reuben managed to convince them to not kill him. Instead, he suggests that they strip Joseph of his robe, throw him into the pit, and leave him to die of starvation. Little did the brothers know that it was Reuben's intention to then come back for Joseph to rescue him. So, the brothers grab Joseph, take his robe, and throw him into his deathbed. After that, they sat around the pit for a while to have a meal. A caravan of Ishmaelites is passing by the brothers as they feast, and one has the bright new idea to sell Joseph into slavery instead of leaving him to suffer in the pit. They then pull Joseph out of the pit and sell him for only twenty silver medallions. As we know, the story of Joseph almost always concludes with a happy ending. Eventually Joseph was placed second hand to Pharaoh and in charge of all of Egypt. One robe was stripped of him, and in the end, he gained robes aplenty.

Our Scripture lesson today is from Genesis 50: 15-21. Joseph and his brothers have realized that their father, Jacob, has passed away and we are now at the very end of Joseph's story, where his brothers plead for forgiveness after

committing horrendous acts against him. According to the brothers, Jacob, had left them a note to read aloud to Joseph. The note reads, "Say to Joseph:

I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you. Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the
God of your father."

The brothers and Joseph wept together. The brothers then fell to their knees saying, "We are here as your slaves." Joseph then says to them in verses 19 through 21, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide
for you and your little ones."

God created us all in her image and with good intent. We were born to love and be loved, to nurture and be nurtured, and to forgive and be forgiven. Like

Jesus, Joseph ran to those who wanted him dead. Like Jesus, In the end, Joseph provided for those who doubted him, embraced those who hardly knew him, and loved those who strayed away. Jesus' love is reflecting in Joseph's image as he forgives and provides for his brothers. Jesus' love is

reflecting within the image of our church, Austin Heights, but where is God
calling us to next?

A little over a year ago, Mrs. Cooper offered me a job here at Austin Heights to be your music minister. I never could have imagined myself here today, sharing my experience with you all, immersed in God's abundant and unconditional love. Here I am, sharing with you something that I once thought was unattainable. Before accepting my position here, I was convinced that I would never find an accepting and an affirming church in deep East Texas. Before I knew it, you all were waiting for me with your arms open wide, ready to be the church family that little Vic had always dreamt of. For years, I've felt like I've been searching for something that was never meant to happen for me, but now, I can finally stop running and I am just beginning to see the finish line. Even though the people of my past intended to do harm to me, God's will has always been intended for good, and the good keeps on coming.

The first few lines of our Psalm reading says, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless her holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all her benefits - who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”

Like Joseph, we are redeemed from the pit and presented with robes of love and mercy. Through Christ, we are healed, and our youth is renewed so that we may be the ones who preserve a numerous people. Brothers and sisters, this is the good news. We find God’s intent while resting in her hands. When we exhale the stress of our week every Sunday morning, we must inhale with peace knowing that we are always surrounded by our mother’s love.

Austin Heights, I leave you with this: You have seen it all. You have always been those who uplift our brothers and sisters of color. You provided a home for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender siblings who didn’t know where they stood in the eyes of God, or how to fit into a congregation. You’ve sheltered activists and cared for your loved ones as a village would

their own. You've created a space for me to discover the calling that little Vic was so curious about. Is our next step out of sight or is it lit in purple and white and placed right in the middle of North Street? There are so many young people who don't attend church out of fear. They fear rejection and abandonment. They fear that there aren't adult congregants who want to listen to their curious questions about who Jesus was and is. They fear that there isn't room for them at the dining table; the dining table in which all of God's children are welcome. Do we wait for our sheep to find their way back to the flock, or do we meet them where they are? Our job is not done yet. Let us nurture our brothers, sisters, and all in between, as God continues to do for us. Allow us to become an open house to those who feel shunned or deceived. Allow us to share our Mother's love.

Now that our home is nice and tidy,
can we begin to go out of our way to bring some extra chairs to our dining
table?

After all, God intended it for good.

Thanks be to God: our Creator, our Nurturer, and Mother of us all. Amen.