

God Had Other Plans

By Keith E Gatling

Sermon for Sept 15, 1996

Lessons for Pentecost 16 in Year A

Genesis 50:15-21

Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

It was a quiet evening in the beginning of June, at the end of his sophomore year. He had just come back from spending a month in Europe with the choir, and would only be home for a week before heading back up to the university for a Summer job.

It was a quiet evening in the beginning of June...until his father came home...then it started...another one of those arguments. No one remembers what triggered it, or what the argument was about, but as usual, it got ugly fast, and sides were drawn. On one side you had him, his mother, and his sister. On the other was his father.

As the arguing continued, his father said one thing, he said another, and then it came...that dreaded line that his father had used on him so many times before...

"Well, if that's the way you're going to be, then I won't pay for college."

That was it. He had had it. He was tired of being controlled and threatened with that line, and he decided to put an end to it right then and there, and he responded, "Then don't!"

With those two words, his father's power over him had been forever lifted, but as he returned to the university for his Summer

job, he had no idea what he was going to do about the Fall.

Even though you meant to do harm to me, God intended it for good.

Joseph said this to his brothers. The brothers who had originally planned to kill him, and instead managed to get him sold into slavery in Egypt. The very brothers who plotted, one way or another, to destroy his life.

He said, "You meant to ruin me, but God used your actions and my new situation for good."

If you know the story, then you know that it was because Joseph had been sold into slavery that he ended up in Potiphar's household, and then in prison as a result of false accusations made by Potiphar's wife. It was because he was in prison that his ability to interpret dreams came to the attention of Pharaoh. And it was because he was able to interpret Pharaoh's dream that he was able to plan for the coming famine, and have enough food in storage not only for Egypt, but for others, including the very brothers who wanted to kill him.

God used the mean spirited actions of Joseph's brothers (and come to think of it,

Potiphar's wife) for a good purpose, and as a result Joseph forgives them and doesn't hold it against them, because he sees the good that has happened as a result.

Can you forgive like that? Can I? For the answers to these questions, let's get back to our friend here who's just left home after that huge bloody argument with his father.

Had that heated exchange in June of 1976 never happened, our friend probably would've graduated with the rest of his class in 1978, and who knows where he'd be now. But because that exchange did happen, we do know where he is now. We know this because I'm that person.

You see, because of that evening in June, I ended up spending the next six years working full time at the SU Library and going to school part time. Had I not spent those extra four years at SU, I would never have had many experiences which I treasure to this day. I never would've traveled with the choir as much as I did, and I never would've become the musical director for SU's annual Goon Show. I would never have met the people who led me to Lutheran Campus Ministry, and had I never joined Lutheran Campus Ministry, I never would've met two of my closest friends, Roxi Kringle and Cheryl Kutscher. And of course, had I not met Cheryl Kutscher, none of us would've met Devra. I also wouldn't be here at King of Kings...as a choir member who for five years got to fulfill his dream of directing a choir, as a Sunday School teacher, and as a deacon sharing this with you now. And this is the short list.

I look back at all the wonderful things in my life over the past 20 years, and I'm able

to see that God used that ugly night in 1976 to make them happen.

And knowing this, I can say to my father, as Joseph said to his brothers, "You meant this for evil, but God had other things in mind. God had better things in mind. Things that might not have happened were it not for what you did. And therefore, I forgive you."

Make no mistake, it's not easy to forgive like this, especially if you're still busy spending time dwelling on the bad things that others have done to you. It's not easy if you can't or won't see any good that God has allowed to come into your life as a direct result of how others have tried to work against you. It's especially hard if you're just at the beginning of your story. But if you can see the good, if you will look for it, then it can become easier to forgive like this, and I'm asking you to look.

Instead of continuing to dwell as an adult on how your parents' divorce hurt you as a kid, ask yourself if God has used that experience to make you a better spouse to your mate and a better parent to your children.

Instead of continuing to dwell on the person higher up in the food chain at your old job who forced you out while protecting someone who was incompetent, ask yourself if God has used that experience to lead you to a more satisfying career that was better suited to the gifts he gave you.

God used the evil that was done in Joseph's life, and in mine for a greater good, and we know how he used the evil done in the life of his own son, Jesus, for the greatest good. Surely these aren't isolated incidents.

Surely these aren't the only three lives in which God has turned evil to good. Look for those situations in your own lives, so that you too are able to say...

You meant it for evil, but God had other plans. I forgive you.