

Camille Cook Murray
Georgetown Presbyterian Church
Oh, say can you see...

July 7th, 2019
Psalm 30
Genesis 50:15-21

Do you remember those flipbooks we used to have as kids where you thumbed through and watched the simple pictures slowly revealing the story. Often they were cartoons of someone falling into a puddle or walking into a tree or something silly like that. You had to make sure your thumb didn't slip or you'd miss half of the story. Also if your thumb didn't start right at beginning you would miss the main plot. Only with each of the individual pictures lined up and reviewed in order could you see the creators intended plot. I was thinking how these flipbooks are a lot like our lives of faith. We are usually focused on just one frame of the story, the present, or maybe just a few frames at a time.

Rarely are we able to really reflect and look frame-by-frame to see our larger lives of faith revealed. But when we do, a greater subplot is revealed and this plot, if you follow along with the pictures, they reveals things about the character of God, things about the provision of blessings, and things about times of growth in our own lives of faith. In our stories, there is a grander plot that might not be seen with a more micro view of the scenes.

When Joseph at the very end of his life, sitting in quiet reflection, flicked through the scenes of his dramatic life, he was able to see the beauty and power of God's providential hand through it all. Joseph's life was a story of betrayal, heartache, and punishment but also a grand tale of salvation, redemption, and forgiveness – but you can only see those bigger themes revealed if you step back and view the whole story from beginning to end. Here is the quick flipbook version of the story of Joseph:

- Joseph was the beloved son of Jacob and was hated by his jealous older brothers.
- Jacob gives Joseph a beautiful multi-colored coat.
- The brothers are not impressed.
- Joseph has vivid dreams about his brothers bowing to him.
- The brothers plot against him and throw him into a well.
- Then they sell him as a slave to some traveling Midianites.
- The brothers put animal blood on Joseph's coat and tell Jacob he is dead.
- Joseph is actually taken to Egypt and sold as a household slave.
- After being falsely accused of crimes, he is thrown into prison.
- In prison, Joseph meets fellow prisoners and impresses them with his ability to interpret their dreams.
- The ruler Pharaoh is having troubling dreams and it is suggested that Joseph could be helpful.
- Joseph's success at interpreting the dreams eventually leads him to be appointed second-in-command over Egypt.

- Having successfully predicted a famine in Pharaoh's dream, Joseph effectively saved Egypt from starvation.
- During the famine, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food.
- The brothers do not recognize Joseph.
- Joseph tricks them and puts Benjamin, the youngest of the brothers into prison.
- The older brothers beg to get Benjamin back and end up bowing to Joseph.
- Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers.
- Joseph sends for his father Jacob and the family is reunited.
- Then Jacob dies and the brothers fear Joseph will now get his revenge against them.
- The brothers beg for forgiveness.
- Joseph forgives them and reflects on all that has happened in his life.
- Joseph professes faith in God's goodness.
- Joseph dies.
- The End.

Okay this is a long flipbook – you'd need about 70,000 sketches to get through that whole narrative. But the point is that in any one of these scenes of Joseph's life you can imagine him experiencing turmoil, pain, sorrow, anger, anxiety, loneliness, doubt, and despair.

- *My brothers hate me.
- *I'm never going to see my father again.
- *I have lost my freedom.
- *I am far from home.
- *I am being wrongly accused.
- *I am working under harsh conditions.

Time and time again Joseph's life seems hard and unfair. And yet, God's goodness, God's provision, and God's presence can be found in the midst of all of those chapters. The common thread of Joseph's life is God's greater purpose working its way out despite the presence of sin and evil and trauma. That is why when Joseph looks back on it all he is able to forgive his brothers and say, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." I believe this is one of the most profound professions of faith in the Bible. As Joseph flipping back through the chapters of his life, he is able to see how God's hand has been at work. Others intended him evil, suffering came his way, sorrow was his closest friend AND YET God intended goodness for Joseph. God revealed goodness to Joseph. God's blessings were all around him. Frame by frame it is hard to see – but with the whole story in hand the truth is revealed.

After the fire at my house early last year, a minister friend sent me a card, with Genesis 50:19 scribbled at the end of the note. I looked up the passage and assumed at first he meant to reference a different passage of scripture. Surely the story of Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers at the end of his tumultuous life had nothing to do with me in this chapter of mine. Or did it? Could Joseph's

profession of God's providence at the end of his life actually have been a piece of encouragement for me in a specific frame of my own journey of faith? Wise and faithful Joseph helps us to see God's mysteries and God's provision in a new way. As we celebrated the 4th of July this week, we reflected on the story of our country with its triumphs and travails. I was reminded of the inspiration of our national anthem, which as the story goes, was inspired by seeing the flag flying in the midst of a nighttime battle at Fort McHenry. It was in the midst of darkness when the British attempted to attack the fort in Baltimore. Observing the scene from afar, Francis Scott Key, could only see the flag when rocket's red glare would illuminate the stars and the stripes. It was because of the darkness and because of the attack that Key could see the Star-Spangled Banner. It was also because of the entirety of the narrative which was revealed, the pictures of battles fought and sacrifices made and freedoms won that Key could profess in the fourth verse of his famous song,

*"Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto – 'In God is our Trust,'"*

At various chapters of our lives we might find ourselves in seasons of darkness, seasons of drought, seasons of death – and we might see only the bombs, the rockets, the battles and fail to see the greater narrative. But as people of faith, we are called to see God at work *even* in these seasons. And when we cannot see God at work in these seasons still to *believe* that God is at work. Because God. Is. At. Work. And someday upon reflection, we will fly that flag, the flag that says 'you intended to do harm to me but God intended it for good.' I'm not sure what that flag would look like exactly but maybe it would look like an empty cross or a stone rolled away or a plate of bread and a cup of wine. The symbols of our faith proclaim that death and despair and evil do not and will not have the final word. God will have the final word. And I believe that our lives, in the fullness of time, will reflect these truths.

As a church we have been reading through the psalms this summer, and I included Psalm 30 today because I wanted you to see that this is another flipbook of faith. The Psalmist writes:

*I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.*

I was in the Pit but was raised. I was sick but was healed. I was despised but found mercy. I was in danger but found security. I was anxious but found friendship. I was flailing but found purpose. I was at battle but found peace. I was in doubt but found faith. I was addicted but found hope. I was depressed but found courage. I was sinful but found grace.

The psalmist concludes:

*Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning...
You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.*

These words of praise could have been written by Joseph. They could have been written by Jacob. These words could have been written by you or by me or by anyone who has been in the Pit, on the battlefield, or in the midst of a perilous fight. If you are in one of these places, our faith in God tells us these chapters are part of a grander narrative. These are pieces of a larger picture. Our mourning will be turned into dancing. Sackcloth will be replaced with colorful coats. Weeping transformed into joy. And tearful cries turned into shouts of praise. May you see this story revealed again and again - in the Bible, in the world, and in your own flipbook of faith. Thanks be to God for intending goodness for us and drawing us up so that we might give thanks forever. Praise be to God.

Amen.