Sermon Series: Rooted in Faith
Sermon Title: Breaking Vicious Family Cycles
Genesis 50:15-21

In the scripture for today, Joseph's father Jacob has died. They worry that he'll be holding a grudge from when they threw him in the pit and sold him into slavery. As such, they tell him that it was his father's will that they forgive him, and he weeps. Joseph tells them not to be afraid for he is not in the place of God. What they meant for evil; God turned around for his good. He says that he will provide for them and their families and treats them with kindness.

We have this gifted young man whose own brothers had sold him into slavery, and he is now facing them once again. This time things have changed. The former slave turned prisoner is now the prime minister, and they need his help. What do you do when the folk who have given you pure hell suddenly need your help? That's the test of a true child of God. Jesus said love those who despitefully use you. The question is how do you break vicious cycles, especially vicious family cycles? When Joseph looked at his brothers, he looked at the layers of family history. Those who had victimized him and were victims of cycles. Every family has them. Every family has some problems and issues. Sometimes it's hidden in the attic or basement, but it's still in the house. If your brothers try to sell you into slavery, it's fair to say there are some issues in the family. Maybe your family didn't sell you into slavery, but they sold you out. How do you move on? In the church we try to cover this stuff up with church language, like "I'm too blessed to be stressed." You can have faith and distinction in the family.

The thing we have to understand is that the victimizers were themselves victims of a vicious cycle. Hurt people, hurt people. That doesn't mean we tolerate the abuse but it gives clarity and perspective. It's not about you but about them. Sometimes the issue is in the family history. Jacob showed favoritism to Joseph because he was the child of his late age. Now parents know that you can't show favoritism but have to love them all the same. Jacob loved Joseph more and Joseph also had big dreams. He also loved Joseph's mother Rachel more than he loved his other wife. Jacob and Esau also didn't get along because Isaac favored Esau and his mother favored Jacob. Abraham favored Isaac over Ishmael. Jealousy, resentment, and violence brought on by favor and favoritism. People of faith ought to be honest because all of us have some brokenness and some stuff that we have to deal with at some point. Think about the cycles and tendons in your own family. Is it anger or resentment? Is it some family secret that only some know? Is it incest or rape? Is it alcoholism? Is it something else? He sees them afraid and says do not be afraid, am I in the place of God? You can't pick your family.

What we have to do to break a vicious family cycle:

1. **Acknowledge** what happened
2. **Affirm** the sovereignty and power of God
3. **Accept** your family members as they are
4. **Act** to break the vicious cycle

Sometimes something happens and sometimes it's in the genes like any other condition of the Bible, like depression. Yes, you can pray about it and God can heal but sometimes God operates in partnership with others that can work together to help you heal. You don't have to stay sick and deal with suicidal ideation. Joseph said I may have been thrown into the pit, but I don't have to stay there. Sometimes you need people who can help love you into good health. Joseph says I'm going to do something about the sickness in my family. I will provide for you and your little ones. I will return evil for good. I myself will act on this vicious cycle. As you act, you don't act alone. You don't act by yourself. Know that as you act, someone will be working and walking beside you. You can break every chain if you will surrender to the one who came just to break vicious family cycles. He says I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

Questions:

1. Have you ever had to help someone who had previously hurt or harmed you? What happened?
2. Do you know the vicious cycles that are in your family? What's in your family history? Are there any cycles that you need to acknowledge?
3. Have you ever showed favoritism or been showed favoritism? Explain.
4. Have you ever witnessed someone else being shown favoritism? How did it make you feel?
5. Are there any people in your family that you need to forgive?
6. Are there any emotions within your family dynamic that you need to let go of?