

Sermon Series: Some Assembly Required: Building strong families

Scripture: Genesis 50:15-21

“Triumphing Over Intergenerational Trauma”

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 17 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for I am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph's own brothers sold him into slavery were now standing before him face to face. But this time, Joseph not the little brother they could pick on and abuse, he is the Prime minister of Egypt. His brothers seek his mercy and forgiveness as they are concerned he will deal with them the way they deserve. Joseph was facing several dynamics of his family drama and trauma. There was no denying the betrayal and heartache and suffering his own family put him through, and now he has a choice to make.

It is here Rev. Warnock recounts the decades of family drama and strife that didn't start with Joseph and his brothers. He notes that victimizers are often victims in a vicious cycle. Joseph's brothers hated him because their father loved Joseph the most and showed him the most favor. Jacob also loved Joseph's mother more than the brother's mother. Even Rachel and Leah were competing for Jacob's love and affection. Jacob and his brother Esau had similar issues involving jealousy and anger and favoritism with their parents, Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac was favored by his father, Abraham, who kicked out his half brother Ishmael and his mother Hagar in order for Isaac to acquire all of Abraham's blessings and inheritance, which was demanded by Isaac's jealous mother Sarah. Whew!

What happened to those who raised us? What was the trauma faced by our parents, grandparents, etc.

Rev. Warnock reflects on the state of our nation and the trauma we have experienced collectively and historically. Our history plays a role in our individual and national families. The wide-spread rage and oppression has been passed down continues because we have not fully addressed the issues of racism, systems of oppression and sources of division. Anger and resentment, depression, and secrets that go unacknowledged trickle down from one generation to the next. Even seemingly good things in life are manipulated into weapons of trauma such as overachievement; being the best means more than anything else, despite your private struggles and still not feeling good enough.

What do we do about the family trauma?

1. **Acknowledge the trauma:** Joseph calls out his brothers and what they did to him and their intentions. Family history matters in how your own life can turn out. We cannot fix our history if we don't acknowledge the mistakes of our past. You can't sweep it under the rug, ban books, lie

about the cruelty and brutality of oppressive systems. We need a spiritual x-ray, a moral MRI. James Baldwin is referenced when he says, "Not everything that is faced can be fixed, but nothing can be fixed if it is not faced." We wonder why we sabotage our own blessings. This is because we don't take the time to address the hurts from the past. No the past cannot be changed, but what will we do to keep the past from repeating itself? Are we willing to face the pain and suffering head on knowing God works all things together for those who love Him and are called according to his purpose?

2. **Affirm the trauma:** Joseph verbalized the oppression his brothers and in spite of their cruelty, God used it for Joseph's good. Affirm the purposes and power of God in your life.
3. **Accept your family and church family members as they are:** Joseph could have placed judgment on his brothers, but took the approach of humility and instead said, "Am I in the place of God?" We all have our faults, and we still have to deal with our family members, church members, and work with them where they are.
4. **Act to break the cycle:** v 21: Joseph becomes the cycle breaker: 'I, myself will take care of this family'. Joseph can't do anything about what happen to him, but he can do something about what happens moving forward. Here is where it runs out: the jealousy, abuse, hate has run out. We are not alone. God is with us in the restoration process. Joseph is the precursor of restoration and reconciliation we ultimately and fully see in Jesus.

Similar to Joseph, Jesus is the ultimate cycle breaker. Adam's disobedience set the vicious cycle in motion. It passed on from one generation to the next. From the old testament to the new, everyone had a problem. But Jesus, born into the drama and trauma, overcame trauma cycle and took on the sins of the world, dying once for all so that those who believe will have eternal life. As believers, we are covered by the blood of Jesus that can break every chain of trauma and pain.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you do when people who spitefully use you ask for your help?
2. Do you think Joseph's brothers came to him in a spirit of reconciliation because of their brotherly relationship or in the spirit of self-preservation to escape Joseph's presumed wrath?
3. Would you still forgive someone you knew had self-preserving motives and not a sincere desire to be back in relationship with you? Why or why not?
4. In each generation of Joseph's family, the one who as hated did nothing to deserve the hate. Do you harbor unforgiveness for someone who may not actually be the source of your hurt and anger?
5. What dynamics, problems, strongholds, trauma can you see in your own family history that is still present today in you and/or your family? What can you personally do about it moving forward?