

Hindsight is 20/20
Genesis 50:15-21
Matthew 18:21-35

There is a well known Buddhist story that goes something like this: There was an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. “Such bad luck,” they said to the man sympathetically.

“Maybe,” the farmer replied.

The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. “How wonderful,” the neighbors exclaimed to the farmer.

“Maybe,” he replied.

The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. “Such bad luck,” they said to the farmer.

“Maybe,” he answered.

The day after the accident, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son’s leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. “What good fortune!” they exclaimed.

“Maybe,” said the farmer.¹

Ever notice how things become clearer when we look at them as part of the past? In my lifetime, I have heard numerous persons exclaim, “Why now? How can God let this happen to me?” I always wished I had a clear cut answer, but more often than not, the answer doesn’t come until much later in life. This is not to say that God was the cause of any of our misfortune. God is not behind sinister plots to make our lives miserable. But I do know that God is with us and by our side when bad things happen. God’s providence works through the good and bad and even in spite of the bad. This is apparent when we look at what happened to Joseph.

When Joseph was first sold into slavery, we don’t really know how he felt, but we don’t read anywhere that he blamed God for his misfortune. And then as things went from bad to worse—he was accused of taking advantage of the wife of an official and thrown into prison—he still didn’t blame God. Rather, Joseph’s faith was so strong that he simply rejoiced in God’s love and took the good with the bad.

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. *Feasting on the Word*. Year A, Volume 4. Westminster John Knox, Louisville. 2011. p. 52.

After several horrible set backs, Joseph was raised to a position of power managing the food for all the people in Egypt. His life had changed so much that his brothers did not even recognize him when they saw him in his position of power. Then when they found out who he was, they were afraid that Joseph would want retaliation. But Joseph's faith had let him to believe that God's providence had worked through their evil plots and gave him this good fortune. How could Joseph be angry with his brothers when God had brought him through his tough times? We are then told that Joseph promises to take care of his extended family and make sure they have enough to eat.

There is no guarantee in life that when we put our trust in God we will never again experience suffering and pain. Suffering is a part of life in every corner of the world. But suffering doesn't have to be the final word. Suffering in many ways brings a new awareness to the eyes of those who suffer. For the parents who lose a child with cancer, new efforts are formed to help fight child cancer. For the family who brushes the depths of poverty, endurance and mercy for others can become strong.

Today as we remember the tragic events of ten years ago on this very date, we are reminded of the horrible suffering that too many persons had to endure. The deaths of so many lives, and the grieving of their loved ones left behind. Looking back on those events we can see how God has used these events to open our eyes. We see the suffering of so many around the world who are under the control of harsh dictators. Our eyes and ears are opened to hearing the cries of those who are oppressed and seek justice and peace. We are reminded that evil actions are alive and well and we ought to pray for peace and work toward peace. I believe that God was weeping with us on 9/11. I believe that God was in sorrow to see how an act of hatred could cause so much pain and suffering. Yet this suffering has caused us to live with greater awareness and less ignorance.

For Joseph, he could look back on his life and see how God's hand was in the works during his life. If he had not been sold into slavery and brought to Egypt, he would not have been able to rise to such a powerful position to help others have food on their tables during the many years of famine.

While suffering is never easy to deal with when we are going through it, we eventually learn that we are often better off having gone through it. Surviving abuse victims often go on to help save the lives of others who are being abused. Cancer survivors often become support persons for those trying to survive cancer. Those whose lives have been touched by poverty and oppression can be led to strive for better care and justice for those in need.

Sometimes, our greatest motivation comes from the hardships we have received in the past. Our hardships can mold us for good or for bad. When our faith rests in the saving grace of God through Jesus, we can learn to mold our lives for the good of others.

I will leave you with a song written and sung by the Christian artist Laura Story. This song, entitled "Blessings" was written by her when she was struggling with her husband's battle with brain cancer. The words go like this:

We pray for blessings
 We pray for peace
 Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
 We pray for healing, for prosperity
 We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
 All the while, You hear each spoken need
 Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things

Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops
 What if Your healing comes through tears
 What if a thousand sleepless nights
 Are what it takes to know You're near
 What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

We pray for wisdom
 Your voice to hear
 And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
 We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love
 As if every promise from Your Word is not enough
 All the while, You hear each desperate plea
 And long that we'd have faith to believe

Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops
 What if Your healing comes through tears
 What if a thousand sleepless nights
 Are what it takes to know You're near
 And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

When friends betray us
 When darkness seems to win
 We know the pain reminds this heart
 That this is not, this is not our home
 It's not our home

Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops
 What if Your healing comes through tears
 And what if a thousand sleepless nights
 Are what it takes to know You're near
 What if my greatest disappointments
 Or the aching(s) of this life
 Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
 And what if trials of this life
 The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
 Are Your mercies in disguise

Prayer:

Gracious and Merciful Lord,

While we never want to suffer, we are grateful that you can use our suffering to help us grow.

Help us to trust your goodness in bad times and know that you are always with us—through both the good and the bad. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.