

Modern Family was a housemate tradition when I was in seminary. You name the time of day, modern family was constantly on. I never gave much attention to “new” television shows but eventually through watching here and there I found it to be absolutely hilarious.

If you haven't seen an episode this show is a 30 minute primetime tv show about what a “modern” family looks like—and the absurdity of it all.

While back in the 50s, the “modern family” looked like the Cleavers—a well put together family, a wife that keeps the house and looks amazing while doing it—a dad that comes home at the end of the day, briefcase in hand kisses his beloved on the cheek and sits at the table with his kids while they eat a family dinner.

Over the years, we have sunk into our couches and sucked our consciousness into the alternate world of “families” according to Hollywood actors and famous writers. The hilarious Michael J Fox as he plays a years beyond his age little brother in Family Ties in the 80s, the hilarious Cosby Show and “Family Matters” episodes of a black families in the suburbs filled our screens--then the 90s hit and our classic depictions of the “nuclear families” changed—we watched “Full House” where three guys raise Donna Joe, Stephanie, and

Michelle. We watched *Gilmore Girls* where a headstrong single mom raises her daughter on her own without the help of her overbearing parents.

Our “Hollywood families” quickly morphed into shows like *Modern Family* and *Parenthood*—single families, kids being raised by grandparents, divorce, death, you name it—the “modern family” depiction on television has reflected the varying array of what we see as the classic family unit in our lives today.

Another place to see a depiction of the motley crews that are dysfunctional families are in scripture. The Bible is not just a book of history, the story of ancient Israel – though history is important and is intimately connected to “family”: the Scripture contains our family history.

In addition, and not accidentally, the Scripture is repeatedly a book that is filled of the stories of the lives of people and their relationships. These lives have been given to us by God on purpose, just as Jesus’s life has been given to us, and through their lives too (our relatives by faith), our sense of who we are, our identity, our character, is to be shaped. Sometimes it’s the positive in their lives, to be emulated.

Sometimes it's the negative, to be avoided. But we belong to them within the family of God.

Even though our preconceived notions of the "perfect family" have changed, what hasn't changed is what we see here in the book of Genesis: guilt, betrayal, hurt, favoritism, love, missed expectations. If we read the stories completely we would be here all day.

What Seth just read was fifteen verses that account the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers. The question we must first ask is how we got there.

Joseph, the dreamer, Joseph the miracle child, Joseph and the coat of many colors, Joseph, it was all about Joseph for he was his father Jacob's favorite. Naturally, this favoritism bore a wedge through Joseph's relationship with his brothers. Joseph, the youngest, who was to carry forth the line from Abraham- the carry out the promise- Joseph was the prized young son of Jacob.

Joseph had a special gift- he was a dreamer—not just the "I have a dream" kind of dreamer, but rather the kind that interprets dreams. And in that time period, that was a valuable skill to interpret what may be considered to be the future or the fate of one who dreams. We

hear in particular the one dream Joseph had that he would inherit the world, that he would grow to be more successful and better off than his brothers and they would soon bow to him.

Can you imagine if your sibling called you up and told you that? And then continued to rub it in your face? It doesn't make it any better than Jacob gifts this magnificent and extravagant coat of many colors to Joseph, and only Joseph.

Jealously, hate brewed—stewed with the insecurity of his brothers—they began to talk among one another—this Joseph had to go—their deep longing for love and acceptance from their father led them to remove the very thing keeping Jacob from his sons: Joseph.

So they had a plan: one day when Joseph was out tending the sheep, they would kill him. Wait, that's too violent Reubenpleas, let's sell him into slavery and tell father he is dead—then we really truly do not have to kill our own. So they do that very thing, returning the coat of many colors to Jacob, this time torn and smeared with blood from the sheep. Whoever says the Bible is boring, clearly hasn't read Genesis.

This dark treacherous turn chapter (??) is painful. Slavery? Unjustly condemned to this life simply by being born into the wrong family at

the wrong time. Yet we quickly see in the following chapters, that somehow there is life after this betrayal. There is life beyond the bonds of slavery, even if lived in captivity.

Joseph's life is traded for a few measley silver coins and the brothers walk away with new hopes of their life sans Joseph. He was gone, their problems are sure to be gone as well. We quickly learn that removing the "problem" was the least of their worries.

Joseph is acquired by the Pharoah's chief officer, Potipher.

However, Potipher quickly realizes that he has purchased more than just a man who can work, but he is also a man that can think: a dreamer. So Potipher gives him more responsibility, begins to build trust—and decides to give Joseph more and more responsibility. Here, we see Joseph rising to the top despite his dismal circumstances. Yet, despite the "success" I wonder how the pang of his separation from his family and his whole life rang in his longing heart. He continues to do as he is told, for he is not his own, he has a master.

And this master's wife has taken a liking to this new slave. She makes numerous advances at Joseph and after it isn't received, she tells her husband that the slave must go. Potipher, with his hands tied, senses something fishy about the situation, yet keeps the peace in his

marriage and rids their family of Joseph. So here he finds himself not only a slave, now, a *prisoner*. Once again “innocent Joseph” in the wrong place at the wrong time leads him to a life at the lowest of society, owned by the Egyptians, far from his family, far from his land and far from God.

He doesn't sulk in this, though, Joseph picks himself up and makes the most of it—eventually the chief jailer notices his gifts and skills and he get put in charge of other prisoners. It is here that Joseph meets two royal officials to the king of Egypt—the Cup Bearer and the Chef. These three become fast friends, notably one day when Joseph interprets some dreams for the Cup Bearer and Chef telling of their impending release from their chains—here he is in prison, enslaved, but still using his gift from God. Soon, the interpretation comes true, Cup Bearer and Chef are once more back into their Royal roles, and Joseph remains in the depths of the cold dark prison, forgotten. His relationship with the two royal officials ultimately is what releases Joseph from prison to the King of Egypt in order to interpret a dream.

Pharaoh's dream is this:

I was standing on the bank of the Nile. ¹⁸ In front of me, seven fattened, stout cows climbed up out of the Nile and grazed on the

reeds. ¹⁹ Just then, seven other cows, weak and frail and thin, climbed up after them. I've never seen such awful cows in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ Then the thin, frail cows devoured the first seven, fattened cows. ²¹ But after they swallowed them whole, no one would have known it. They looked just as bad as they had before. Then I woke up. ²² I went to sleep again^[c] and saw in my dream seven full and healthy ears of grain growing on one stalk. ²³ Just then, seven hard and thin ears of grain, scorched by the east wind, sprouted after them, ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the healthy ears. I told the religious experts,^[d] but they couldn't explain it to me."

²⁵ Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh has actually had one dream. God has announced to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears of grain are seven years. It's actually one dream. ²⁷ The seven thin and frail cows, climbing up after them, are seven years. The seven thin ears of grain, scorched by the east wind, are seven years of famine. Seven years of great abundance are now coming throughout the entire land of Egypt. ³⁰ After them, seven years of famine will appear, and all of the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. ³¹ No one will remember the abundance in the land because the famine that follows will be so very severe. ³² The dream

occurred to Pharaoh twice because God has determined to do it, and God will make it happen soon.

PHAROAH:“Since God has made all this known to you, no one is as intelligent and wise as you are.⁴⁰ You will be in charge of my kingdom,^[f] and all my people will obey^[g] your command. Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, he dressed him in linen clothes, and he put a gold necklace around his neck....**[JOSEPH]**is renamed and gets married. Joseph was 30 when this all began and for seven years of harvest, the crops and food were plentiful. As was Joseph’s wife who bore him two children: Manasseh “For God has helped me forget my troubles and all in my father’s household” and Ephraim “For God has given me children in the land that has treated me harshly”. His life has completely changed; it is now characterized by success, gold, power, fame, and authority. He has a new family, and has done his best to forget his previous life.

The seven years of abundance in the land of Egypt came to an end,⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. The famine covered every part of the land, and Joseph opened all of the granaries^[h] and sold grain to the Egyptians.

But the famine's severity extended even to Canaan. Jacob sends his sons to Egypt for bread. Because Joseph was the "distributor" of life, the men come and request grain and don't even notice their brother.

And it is here that Joseph meets his brothers, confronted with the pain of betrayal, the reminder of his pompous ego that led a wedge between him and his family. It is here that Joseph remembers his beloved father.

After playing with their heads a bit and threatening their lives, he loses it. He meets his youngest brother Benjamin, Jacob's new beloved and it reminds him of this father. Joseph's feelings of grief and pain, and betrayal all come to him at once and encompass him. He embraces his brothers, shedding the most painful tears of all. This exhausting narrative reaching its climax in the most unexpected place. Of sheer vulnerability—shedding all pride and hate.

Reconciliation looking so vulnerable, so painful, so relieving. It is after this warm embrace Joseph pulls his family into the fold, preserving them through the famine.

Joseph's weeping stops us in our tracks—this sorted narrative with peaks and valleys and backs and forths, and the tears halt the storyline, reminding us of the gut wrenching pain of being confronted with the repercussions of your decisions—whether you find yourself as the brother of Joseph or Joseph. Reconciliation is messy. Family relationships are messy.

Why? Because these things cannot be solved in a neat manner like that of preparing for a famine—our relationships and brokenness is not something that goes by with enough time or therapy, education, a new place, a new promotion, a new life or even a new family.

Relationships are messy because we ourselves are messy individuals.

But our scripture today shows us that despite our best attempts to be “godly” and do everything by the book, reconciliation is still ever so needed. Reuniting ourselves once more with God.

This passage is important because it shows a turn of events that seem constantly like Joseph is being kicked while down. Just when you think it can't get worse, it does, and somehow in the thick of it all, Joseph reflects that God has been in all of it. Not causing it, not but redeeming it. And this I believe is key—this story is not an easy one to read from scripture, and I'm sure we have other endings we would

have anticipated, but this is here in our canon for a reason—that somehow in the muck of human greed, insecurity, hate, jealousy, and the worst of intentions—

God works through our brokenness, our messiness, and redeems the world, despite us. God works through us and works with us to fulfill God's ultimate good for the world. Reunifying the tears of the world with the deep embrace of the world's needs.

I spoke last Sunday how it has been hard to be a pastor in the pulpit in this tumultuous time in our nation and in our world. It has been hard because I myself have wondered where the hope is—where God is working despite our brokenness. And what I have discovered that there are no words, no protest, no counter protest that can fully reconcile all the pain we see day in and day out in our city, in our families, in our relationships.

If God is working to redeem the world through our brokenness than we must stand firm, embrace the tears of the world, and seek to be God's instruments, even though we may feel enslaved, or that we ourselves are in the depths of human sorrow or fear. To educate ourselves, to seek to know the other, to see God's face in someone who is different than us, and to move outside of this space and work

alongside God knowing that you yourself can't change the world, but that God, and God's inseparable love will provide the hope we need to carry on—even if the knot in your throat seems debilitating, even if the cancer diagnoses seems to grim, even if the jobs seem to be lacking, even if the bills keep coming, even if the hate seems to be overtaking the good, even if the justice system seems far from just, or just right. Even if you have lost all hope.

I invite you to close your eyes for a moment.

In the silence of this moment I invite you to remember the days of summer that filled you with joy. For me, it was that Sunday we opened the windows and the breeze flew in and we could hear the birds and nature and the people as if they were a part of our service, and rightly so. And then, we experience days like Friday, when all the beauty of the world, seems to come to a screeching halt and moving forward at the pace of humidity. Friday was a slow day, full of heat and humidity—the air pressure was giving me a headache in late afternoon and I retreated to our little home and relaxed as I watched the trees blowing from side to side. Something was ominous. It was hard to even imagine the cool summer days in this mess. Suddenly

you could cut the air with a knife—darker and darker it got the more the thunder in the distance broke forth to rain..pouring, lightning and thunder- the clouds were so threatening. In the heat of the storm I remembered I had to go to the pharmacy, so I ran to my care and drove to Exton witnessing a dark 6pm, eerily gloomy and as humid as could be.

After I got out of the pharmacy I found that nothing had changed, but it was brighter—I looked out and saw the dark luminous clouds in the distance—but also sunshine to my right, and a HUGE vibrant double rainbow breaking through the dark clouds and threatening Summer storm. And there everyone in the parking lot stopped. Looked, soaked it in: there in the rain, we were brought to silence gaping up at the sky remembering.

Remembering the promises of God: This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. ¹³I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over

the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures.

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I will bless you and you and your descendants will be blessed. I am the way the truth and life-

but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When

you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! 2"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.

Stand firm in the hope of God, who redeems the world, one human mistake at a time.