

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: "God works it out for good."
 Scripture: Genesis 37:3-8, 17-22, 26-34 & 50:15-21
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 November 23, 2025
 Opener: "This Is My Father's World" Choruses: "Way maker", "How great is our God"
 Hymn after Sermon: "Psalm 23"
 Closer: "All the Way My Savior Leads Me"

We live in a world of dashed dreams.
 Think of that young person,
 Gifted beyond their peers
 When it comes to anything athletic.

She excelled at soccer and hockey and basketball,
 But eventually chose volleyball.
 In her first year of university
 she was a top scorer on her team.
 But one morning someone was rushing to work
 And ran a light at an intersection.
 Now the athlete whose joy was jumping up at the net
 Is struggling to lift their legs in a wheelchair.
 Her world has suddenly become smaller and heavier—
 and she wonders how everything changed so quickly.

Or think of that middle-aged couple
 Who started their own business.
 They had everything that was necessary
 To make a decent go of it:
 the skills, the passion, and the opportunity.
 After only three years off the ground,
 They were beginning to see a return on their investment.
 But in a quick succession they were hit by tariffs,
 Rising interest rates, and a supplier that went under.
 Now they are shutting the doors.
 They sit with the weight of dreams that once felt so reachable,
 now slipping between their fingers.

Or think of that retiree.
 She has given her life to raising a family.
 And just when she thought she could transition
 a simpler life of grandparenting

and rediscovering old hobbies, her hubby falls ill.
 Now she finds herself in a new role of caregiver
 caring for his physical and emotional needs
 while taking on all those tasks he used to manage.
 She never imagined she'd be carrying so much responsibility,
 at a stage of life when she hoped to rest.

We live in a world of dashed dreams.
 Some of those dreams are upended by our own poor decisions.
 Some of those dreams are torpedoed by the work of bad actors.
 Some of those dreams are snuffed out by larger forces
 Outside of our influence or control.

So what is our hope
 when the world seems to be conspiring against us?
 As followers of Jesus we believe that
 "God works for the good of those who love him,
 who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

"God works for the good of those who love him
 Who have been called according to his purpose."
 Paul spoke this promise in his letter to the church at Rome.
 This same promise is illustrated in today's Old Testament lesson.

Today enter the story of Joseph a son of Jacob.
 The same Jacob
 who had a dream of a ladder stretching up into heaven.

Today's readings are the bookends
 Of Joseph's saga
 so if you are curious
 To know what happens in between
 I encourage you to pick up the story later at home.
 At the outset of this saga
 Joseph is one of the youngest
 [he had a younger brother, Ben]
 And the most favored of his father.
 This favoritism wasn't subtle.
 His dad made him an 'ornate robe'
 That was a constant reminder to his brothers.
 Most of us recall stories of Joseph's multicolored robe,

his technicolor Dreamcoat.

"The traditional interpretation of a coat of many colors goes back to the Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament. Most [modern] commentators favor something more along the line of a full-length coat or a long-sleeved coat..." (CBSB 82)
 Whatever the case we know
 That rank and status is communicated
 By what we wear.

If all the kids in one family
 Are wearing Superstore's Joe Fresh branded outerwear,
 While one is suited up in pricey Arc'teryx,
 We know they are the favored child.

Joseph was favored by his father,
 Which wasn't his fault.
 But Joseph didn't do himself any favors.
 In some verses we didn't read
 We are told that previously he had
 Given his dad a bad report about his brothers.

And today we learned that he had a dream.
 For the ancients, "Dreams [were] a way
 that God's purposes and will [were] revealed." (Walke 500)
 Joseph dreamed not just once but twice
 That his family would be bowing before him.

God was telling him something about his future
 That he should have kept in his back pocket.
 He was already resented because of the robe—
 and these dreams only poured fuel on the fire
 of his brother's jealousy.

But Joseph is young and immature.
 He lacks empathy and emotional intelligence.
 He proudly shares his dream
 Which is like rubbing salt into all their wounds.

This makes them fed up with Joseph.

The next time he comes round,
 Sent by their father to check on them,
 They are already plotting to get rid of him.
 While their first thought is to kill him,
 They settle on selling him to some traders.

But they don't let him leave with that precious robe.
 They strip the robe from him, shred it, and soak it in blood.
 Then they show it to their father
 and let him draw his own conclusions.

Jacob who had deceived his own dad
 by covering his arms with goat skins,
 is now deceived by goat blood.
 Jacob believes Joseph is dead.

Joseph has a dream from God.
 But his own dreams of a comfortable life
 With his family are shattered.
 He has gone from the favorite son, to a disregarded slave,
 who is being trafficked far from his homeland.

Joseph is at the beginning of his own character-building journey.

What follows is a series of rise and falls,
 Successes and failures.
 He will end up managing an Egyptian officials' home,
 Only to be accused of sexual assault and thrown into prison.
 But his facility with dreams
 And his gift of administration
 Will eventually take him into the corridors of power.
 He will one day become the CEO of the entire kingdom of Egypt.

It is in this role that he is reunited with family.
 Joseph has prepared Egypt for a regional famine
 That eventually afflicts Canaan, his family's homeland.
 When his brothers travel to Egypt to purchase food
 Joseph recognises them, and persuades them
 To resettle in Egypt under his care.
 The favorite son and father are reunited

Joseph is re-introduced to his youngest brother.
The entire family is able to survive because of Joseph's role in Egypt.

But eventually Jacob dies,
And this is where we pick up the end of today's reading.

With their father's death, Joseph's brothers are now worried.
They recognise Joseph's power in Egypt.
They understand their dependence on his good grace.

They are afraid that Joseph has been harboring bitterness
About how they had mistreated him.
They are worried that his kindness
Was simply for the sake of their father,
And now that Jacob is dead, Joseph will take revenge.

And so they arrange a meeting with Joseph,
but first send him a message
Claiming to that their father had left a will
Which demanded that Joseph to forgive his brothers.
When they finally arrive in his presence,
They lose confidence in their fabrication,
And throw themselves at his feet begging for mercy,
Saying "we are your slaves."

This moment clearly depicts
The fulfilment of God's dream Joseph had received in his youth:
the brothers are bowing before Joseph.

Of course the older Joseph is much different than the younger Joseph.
His tumultuous journey has blessed him with wisdom, empathy, and humility.

He tells them: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?
You intended to harm me,
but God intended it for good
to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.
So then, don't be afraid.
I will provide for you and your children." (Genesis 50:19-20)

"Do not be afraid."
"[This response] is the primary way in the Bible

of giving assurances to those who are frightened or endangered.
We have heard it with Abraham [and Isaiah]...
And it is used at the birth of Jesus and in his resurrection." (Brueggeman 372-373)

Here it falls from the lips of Joseph
Who has matured into a gentle and protective brother.
He is able to forgive all the harm he has endured
Because he has the wisdom to recognise
How God has blessed him with goodness
Despite his brother's evil intentions.

We live in a world of broken dreams.
But we can live with hope because
we follow a God who is working out his good purposes
despite our bad choices, despite bad actors,
despite larger forces that seem to conspire against us.
Joseph's story isn't the only place
where we see God working amidst broken dreams.
We see it in our own world today—in other lives shaped by hardship.
Some of you have heard about the life and ministry
Of Joni Eareckson Tada.

This week while I was running around the track
I was listening to a podcast where she was being interviewed.
The podcaster introduced Joni as a person who has
"written countless books [45],
[and] founded an international ministry
serving 3.1 billion people with disabilities worldwide.
[He also noted] she has survived breast cancer twice.

[For those who have never heard about her
he recapped her story, how]
she dove into the Chesapeake Bay at 17,
emerged paralyzed from the shoulders down..."
(Joni Eareckson Tada on When God Shows Up in the Breaking |
The Russell Moore Show *Christianity Today*)

During the interview they discussed a number of topics
Including the ongoing challenges of that devastating injury.
Now in her 70s Joni noted that life was not easy:
"I need God desperately every single day. [she said]

There's not a day that I wake up that I don't feel, oh Lord Jesus,
 I am I am so tired of quadriplegia, my chronic pain.
 I'm tired of lungs that can barely get enough oxygen.
 Jesus, I don't have the strength for this day.
 I cannot do it, but you can."

The podcaster later asked her
 If now knowing all that she's been able to accomplish despite her disability,
 whether she would advise her young self
 Not to take that devastating dive so long ago.

I found her response intriguing:
 In her own words:
 "I was at the headquarters of Johnny and Friends
 and as is often the case, we do tours for, you know,
 Christian schools and whatnot.

And there was a homeschool group who came in and a little boy,
 11-year-old, Austin, his name, asked me,
 "Miss Tada, if you could go back and tell your 17-year-old self
 not to take that dive, would you do that?"...

I could have I could have said to that 17-year-old,
 you know, guess what, Joni?
 You might be paralyzed and depressed now lying in this hospital bed,
 but one day you're going to be the leader of this global ministry
 to people with disabilities all over the world.

[And] I think I would have said, "I don't care. I want my body back."

And I said to Austin, this little boy, I said, Austin, I think I just would have said,
 "No, no, no way. That's very nice, but I'm sure that's for somebody else.
 Please just give me back my hands and my legs.
 Which...to me proves that faith is trusting God
 when you cannot see the blueprint...

I mean even even if I had seen the blueprint,
 it would have been totally unsatisfying,
 totally unremarkable because what I want was to walk.
 I wanted my hands back.

So I think it was indeed the power of God,
 and my faith in his ability to make it all work out for good somehow someday.

I'm just getting me through the day
 and then the next day
 and the next
 until finally...decades later here I am.

PAUSE

Joseph was given God's dream
 Even as his own were broken and dashed.

Would it help all of us to have God's dream,
 To see the future in advance?
 Joni doesn't think so...

Ultimately it comes down to faith
 Trusting that in all our broken dreams,
 God remains faithfully at work—
 shaping us, sustaining us,
 and bringing about a good
 [character for ourselves and blessings for others]
 That we cannot yet see.

May we have faith to trust that "in all things
 God works for the good of those who love him,
 who have been called according to his purpose."

Thanks be to God. Amen.