



# First United Church of Oak Park

## Intentions

Genesis 50:15-21

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There's a commercial on TV right now for a low-sugar ice cream in which a brother and sister are sitting at the kitchen counter across from their mom who is looking like she's actually enjoying this low-sugar ice cream. The little boy asks the mom, "Who's your favorite child, me or Sarah?" Sarah says, "She doesn't have a favorite, you know that!" and the Mom replies, "Don't be silly, of course I do. Sarah's my favorite." The little boy is devastated, and then the tag line appears on the screen, "Don't sugarcoat it." It seems that Joseph's father Jacob may have also eaten low-sugar ice cream, because he certainly didn't sugarcoat it either. Everyone knew Joseph was his favorite. Joseph's brothers were, of course, keenly aware.

There was a gift that solidified this favoritism. You may remember the story from Sunday School of Joseph and his coat of many colors, or if you got your Bible trivia knowledge from the theatre, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." This favoritism made his brothers very angry. Joseph's brothers hated him so much that they wanted to kill him, but they decided instead, in perhaps the worst act of sibling rivalry of all time, to sell him into slavery in Egypt. Joseph's brothers then found themselves in the midst of a famine and had to go down to Egypt to try to find food, and--plot twist--their brother that they had sold into slavery was now the big guy in charge in Egypt. Even though they didn't deserve it, Joseph made sure they were cared for. With Joseph's reversal from most to least and back to most powerful brother, there is great worry that he will seek revenge. Joseph's brothers are always anticipating that Joseph is going to turn on them and treat them the way they treated him, but he never does. Instead Joseph says "you intended me evil, but God has used it for good. What you intended for evil, God has used for good."

When we are in the midst of feeling hurt, betrayed, and wronged, we can remember that God can work any circumstance into good. I think it's a dangerous and wrong interpretation to say, "you intended this for evil, but God intended it for good," as in, "it was God's plan that Joseph be sold into slavery." God does not plan evil things for us. I don't believe God wants bad things to happen to us or that they are a part of God's plan. I don't believe God tests us and hurts us. On the contrary, whatever evil other humans intend against us, Joseph's story is a reminder to us that God's intentions are so good that there is no circumstance God cannot use for the good of God's people. Bad things happen, and people

and systems hurt us, but God is love and love does not hurt; it heals. It healed Joseph so deeply that he was able to move on with his life after the ultimate betrayal.

I don't know what wrongs you have experienced or how you may feel betrayed. I must say after all the Supreme Court decisions this week, I feel hurt by a system that fails to protect those who actually need protections and instead is protecting privilege and power. Perhaps you feel that pain, or perhaps you are experiencing some other pain right now. Perhaps you have experienced religious trauma and been hurt by a church experience. Perhaps you have been passed over for a promotion at work. Perhaps a family member has betrayed your trust. Perhaps you are just experiencing the pain of living in this world full of hurt humans, hurting each other.

I don't know what your hurt looks like, but I do know that whatever you are going through, no matter how awful and no matter how evil, it is not beyond redemption. Our God is the God of bending swords into plowshares, the God who prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies, who works all things together for good, whose own death leads to abundant life. There is nothing beyond redemption. Whatever you are going through now, whatever evil you are witnessing in the world, hold tight to your faith in the God who can use even evil for good. God's intentions are good, and God will find a way.

Amen.