

The Gracious Highway
Genesis 45: 1-15
February 20, 2022
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

I propose to show that God offers us a path toward holiness, and we can choose to follow that path, but, even if we stray for a while, God can make use of our wrong turns to bring us back to our intended destination if we slow down, so that those hearing this sermon will pause to see God's signs to aid us on our way.

May the God who Creates us..

Good Morning!

I spend a lot of time driving on the Lodge Freeway, the 10. My house is just a half mile from an entrance and when I drive down to the Cathedral and Diocesan offices it's just a mile south. Hop on, hop off, I'm at work or at home in 7 mins. When I journey on a Sunday to make a congregational visit, almost every single trip includes an initial stint on its lanes.

After two years, this is what I have come to believe about the Lodge: it's a racetrack, an unofficial speedway, its side lanes are littered with bumpers formerly attached to cars who have not managed to avoid hitting each other as they accelerate toward a mythical, moving finish line. In the winter, it's only salted lightly and not plowed quickly and, in the spring, it floods like you read about it.

It is also the most convenient way for me to make my way anywhere I am going.

What to make of this road? (Hold that question for a bit.)

Let's turn our attention to Genesis and Joseph and his brothers. Remember Joseph and his Techni-color rainbow coat of many colors? Remember how his brothers, sons of their father, the patriarch Jacob, remember how they conspired against their younger brother Joseph and left him in a pit, to be found by slave traders and carried away to Egypt.

Remember? They were jealous, his father seemed to love him more, gave him gifts like the coat of many colors. And Joseph was obnoxious. He lorded over his siblings his father's love and told them continually of dreams where they were bowing before him and how one day, he was sure, he would rule over them all.

Remember, after a while they reached a point of saturation. Maybe it was an exceptionally hot desert day, and they were short on water, or maybe they were feeling poorly about themselves, or group think got the best of them. Whatever it was, they decided to conspire to kill him. Reuben, however, at the last minute, convinced them to merely throw him into an empty water pit. "Leave him there and we won't have blood on our hands." Planning on coming back later and rescuing him.

Did God cause Joseph to be hated by his brothers and sold into slavery? Did God make this whole sordid soap opera happen? Does God make the hard events of our lives happen to be part of some overarching mystical, divine plan?

Biblical Theologian Walter Brueggemann in his commentary on the book of *Genesis*, says that “God’s purpose is worked out in human history through the actions of identifiable persons,” (*Genesis: Interpretation A Bible Commentary* p 348). And that, “God’s will is not domesticated or limited by human choice,” (p 347). And my favorite of Brueggemann’s line about this passage, “God’s purpose is utterly gracious,” (p 347).

Did God cause Joseph to be hated by his brothers, is this all part of some divine plan? As Joseph seems to interpret, or could it be as Brueggemann alludes, that we have the ability to speed along on the highway of our lives, following only our own desires and fetishes, acting only on our personal self-absorbed interests, crashing into people when they get in our way, cutting others off, discarding them in pits, we can do these things, freely and even wantonly. But, if and when we slow down, when we acknowledge other people’s pains, when we give of ourselves out of compassion for others as Judah did, when he said to Joseph, “Take me as a slave and let my brother go.” (Genesis 44:33) it is in those moments when God can make holiness and gracious goodness out of our mistakes and fractious actions that fill our flawed lives.

The path that God has longed for us to take is there before us, like a highway with lanes. When we pause, cease to push down so hard and fast on the accelerator of our lives, and instead, look around, out our windows and in our mirrors, and begin to see the theological signposts that guide us on right paths, it is then that God can make use of our previous messed up choices, God can make wrong turns right and offer hope where there is harm.

Let’s go back to my current favorite Freeway, the Lodge. It can be a racetrack of destruction, or if we abide by the lines, take advice from the signs, there is every possibility it can get me safely to and from my hoped for destinations.

God’s way, God’s longed for path for us is usually marked with on ramp and exit lanes, speed limits and signs for different destinations. We can wind up losing our way when we put our heads down and barrel on by convinced, we alone know the way. Or we can slow down, read the markers, stop, and even ask for directions.

For as Walter Brueggemann says, “God’s purpose is utterly gracious.”

Amen.