We have two remarkable stories today:

One very real, about a dysfunctional family and sibling jealousy;

and the other unbelievable – Jesus and Peter walking on water.

* The one story shows us *where and how* God acts

and the other shows us *who* God is and *what God’s word does*.

* The one story *points* us to Jesus

and the other *shows* us Jesus.

…

So often, we imagine God as far removed from human affairs

– only occasionally meddling to do something extraordinary.

In this imagination, prayer is asking God to meddle in ways that we see fit – usually tailored to our personal specifications.

We fall into such imagination because it is hard for us to look at the world the way it is and see God present and active.

Take the story of Joseph and his brothers – the first chapter in a long and wonderful story in Genesis.

This is a picture of God at work—but not as we would expect.

We see sinful, broken humanity.

* A father who plays favorites
* Brothers who are not only envious, but whose envy becomes malicious.
* Jealousy that leads to murderous hatred,
	+ betrayal,
		- deception,
			* outright lies.

 Can God really be here?

**Can God be present where the devil is active?**

You betcha!

 **In fact, the entire story of God is precisely God being present where Satan is hard at work making life miserable.**

Joseph’s story is of a man who speaks the hard truth,

whose own family does not want to hear it,

whose brothers seek to kill him,

who is handed over to others for twenty pieces of silver.

Sound familiar?

**Joseph prefigures Jesus Christ as the Savior.**

We will hear more about this next Sunday when we hear the end of the story.

…

But here, in this opening chapter of the Joseph saga, where do we see God at work?

Is God even at work?

Let’s consider:

* Terrible things are happening – but Joseph’s life is spared.
* God was at work in Reuben, who lobbied not to kill Joseph.
* God was at work in Judah, who lobbied to sell Joseph rather than kill him.

Yet, God thwarted Reuben’s good plan to rescue his brother from the pit –Why?

Don’t we find ourselves in similar situations?

We have a problem, and we can see a solution,

but something gets in the way and the problem remains.

I often work with people who have housing needs.

One day they are living in their home, going to work, raising the children.

But then – something happens—a **job** is lost, **medical bills** come, a **fire**

– **rent** payments get behind, an **eviction** notice comes.

What now?

* Shelters are full,
* housing authorities are out of money,
* and families are forced to go one of two ways
	+ – to become homeless on the streets,
	+ or homeless in a motel, spending any income they can muster on paying the room bill and hustling any assistance they can. .

Where is God in this?

…

Let’s turn back to Joseph’s story.

God had a greater purpose for Joseph’s family that was not yet perceivable

But in fact, **God was active**,

not only sparing Joseph’s life,

but also providing the caravan

 that would take him exactly where God wanted Joseph to be for his greater purpose.

**Amid this terrible, evil, human drama,**

**God was present and active for a purpose far greater than anyone can see.**

…

Can we see our own lives in a similar light?

 Awful things happen to us – like the housing situation I described earlier.

 When we cannot perceive how God is working for a greater purpose, We must trust God to be doing so

– for he has promised never to forsake his people.

And( Romans 8): **28**… we know that God causes everything to work togetherfor the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

We believe this **especially** when we cannot see it, knowing that God’s love for us is greater and stronger than anything life can throw at us.

we pray:

O Lord, Even when I walk
    through the darkest valley,

Where death itself could come to me,
I will not be afraid,
    for you are close beside me.

**Faith trusts in the Lord to have our back when nothing else does.**

Peter is a good example of this, though he was pushed to the very limit to be convinced.

There he was – walking on water!  **simply because Jesus commanded him to and he trusted Jesus’ word--**

* + Until he allowed the world around him to have more influence over him than Jesus.
	+ Until he noticed the wind
		- * + and became afraid
	+ And all of a sudden he sank.
* This is what happens to us, too, when we think God is absent during our trials and tribulations.
* when we give up on faith because things aren’t going our way.
* when we look around at the world and doubt God’s presence because of all the evil we see and hear.

**We sink**.

* We sink into depression, anxiety, anger, hopelessness.
* unbelief, hatred, misery and self-pity
* drugs, alcohol, or other escapes from reality
* We sink into the depths where Satan loves to whisper, “See, where is your God? Come, you’ll be better off with me”

**But did Peter drown that day? Did he sink into oblivion?**

**No! He cried out to Jesus – “Lord, save me!”**

And Jesus reached out his arm and caught him.

And they walked together back to the boat.

Whether we are facing situations like Joseph, sinking like Peter,

or find ourselves teetering on the brink of accepting Satan’s offer,

**It is never too late to cry out, “Lord, save me!”**

And our God always responds, *“Take heart – Jesus is here – do not be afraid.”*

And no matter how far or painful the journey

**-- the Lord walks with us back to the boat, back to life.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen