## Sermon

**When the Ground Gives Way** *Genesis 37:1–28 | Matthew 14:22–33*

Some days announce themselves.

A wedding day.

The birth of a child.

Graduation.

Retirement.

We know those days are coming. We circle them on the calendar. We count the weeks until they arrive.

But the days that shape us most rarely introduce themselves.

They usually arrive looking like every other day.

Joseph woke up expecting to run an errand.

His father said, "Go and see if your brothers are well."

It wasn't a difficult assignment.

Find your brothers. Check on the flock. Come home.

That's all.

He had walked those hills before. He knew the paths.

He knew where the sheep usually grazed.

He knew the voices he expected to hear long before he saw their faces.

He was looking for his brothers.

But he had no idea his brothers were waiting for him.

Genesis says, *"They saw him from a distance."*

It is such a simple sentence.

Pause

*But it holds an entire tragedy.*

Joseph sees family. His brothers see an opportunity.

Joseph is **carrying his father's concern**.

His brothers are *carrying years* of resentment.

Pause

Two stories...

walking toward the same moment.

I'm guessing most of us know what that feels like.

Moments when life quietly divides into two chapters.

Before... and after.

Before the *phone* rang. Before the *test results*.

Before the *conversation*. Before the *loss.*

Nothing looked unusual that morning.

Only later did we realize

we had crossed a line

we could never cross back over.

Pause

Joseph finally reaches his brothers.

Before he can speak... they seize him.

They strip away the robe his father had given him.

Which was more than clothing.

It was the visible sign that he is loved.

And before they throw him into the pit, they take away the thing that has always reminded him who he is.

Then they lower him into an empty cistern.

No water. No ladder.

Only rock darkness and silence.

Pause

Only years later will Joseph say to his brothers,

*"I pleaded with you."*

Genesis doesn't tell us that until much later.

Almost as if we are not ready to hear it the first time.

"I pleaded with you."

Can you hear him? Calling each brother by name.

Certain someone will stop this.

Certain someone will reach down a hand.

But No one does.

Pause

Then comes one of the coldest sentences in all of Scripture.

*"Then they sat down to eat."*

Joseph is crying from the pit.

His brothers are eating lunch &  same sun shines on both.

Yet they are living in completely different worlds.

Pause

The Bible refuses to hurry past that sentence.

&  Neither should we.

Because every one of us has known a pit.

Maybe not the same pit.

But some place we never expected to be.

Pause

Perhaps yours was a hospital room.

Perhaps it was an empty chair where someone always sat.

Perhaps it was the quiet after a relationship ended.

All details are different.

But the question is always the same.

**Where is God now?**

Pause

Notice what Genesis does not do.

It does not answer the question.  God does not speak.

An angel does not appear & Joseph is not rescued.

The silence remains.

And perhaps that is why Matthew tells the story he does.

The disciples are on the Sea of Galilee.

Notice why. Not because they ignored Jesus.

Because they obeyed him.

Sometimes faithfulness leads us into places we never would have chosen.

Pause

Night falls. The wind rises.

The waves begin to pound against the boat.

Remember these are experienced fishermen.

If anyone knows this lake, they do.

But there comes a moment

when experience is no longer enough

when strength reached its limit.

A moment when even the best boat feels terribly small.

Pause

Then someone looks into the stormy darkness.

"There..." A figure.

Walking toward them.

Not waiting on the shore. Not calling from a distance.

Walking through the **very thing they fear.**

Matthew says they cried out because they thought they were seeing a ghost.

Can you blame them?

Pause

**Fear** changes the way we see.

Fear makes love look like *abandonment.*

or

Silence like *absence*. & even delay look like *indifference.*

Pause

Joseph looks into the darkness of the pit

and sees only the end of his story.

The disciples look into the darkness of the sea

and see only the end of their story

And if we're honest we do the same.

We begin believing that our circumstances

*are telling us the truth.*

That the **diagnosis** tells us who God is.

That **grief** tells us what the future holds.

That **disappointment** gets the final word.

& without realizing it...

we let our circumstances become our theologian.

And that is the question

both stories quietly place before us.

Not whether the pit is real. **It is.**

Not whether the storm is frightening. **It is.**

The real question is this:

**Who has the authority to tell us the truth about God?**

Pause

The pit? The storm? Or the One who has not spoken yet...

Then at last Jesus speaks.

*"Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."*

Jesus does not explain the storm or

tell the disciples why the wind came.

or promise they will never face another night like this.

Pause

He simply gives them something greater than an explanation.

**He gives them himself.**

Peter answers, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come."

Jesus replies with one word.

*"Come."*

For years I imagined Peter stepping onto the water.

Pause

Now I think Matthew wants us to notice something else.

Peter is not just stepping onto water.

**Peter is stepping toward a voice he has learned to trust.**

There is a difference.

Pause

Peter's confidence is not in the sea or in himself.

His confidence is in Jesus.

PERIOD Pause

Then Peter notices the wind & begins to sink.

I think most of us know that feeling.

Not because we have walked on water.

Because we have reached the place where our strength was no longer enough.

Matthew could have ended the story there.

"Peter failed."

Instead, he tells us something far more important.

*"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand."*

Immediately.

Before Peter could pull himself together or

recover his courage.

Before he could prove anything. Jesus reached for him.

That is the heart of this story.

Not Peter's grip on Jesus.

**Jesus' grip on Peter.**

Pause

And perhaps that is also the moment that finally unlocks Joseph's story as well.

Years later, Joseph will be able to look back

and see a larger picture.

Not because the pit was good. It wasn't.

Not because betrayal was somehow holy. It wasn't.

**But because the pit had never been qualified to tell him the truth about God.**

The pit could describe where Joseph was.

But It could not describe where God was.

Only God can do that.

The storm could describe what the disciples were facing.

But it could not describe who Jesus was.

Only Jesus could do that.

Pause

Perhaps that is why these stories have endured for centuries.

Not because every generation has its own pit and its own storm.

But because every generation is tempted to let suffering become its preacher.

We let fear tell us the future.

We let loss tell us who we are.

We let disappointment speak the last word.

And the gospel quietly says,

"No.

Those voices are real.

But they are not final."

The final word belongs to the One who walks into the storm.

The final word belongs to the One who reaches into the pit.

The final word belongs to Jesus Christ.

I wonder what voice has been interpreting your life lately.

Has it been fear?

Has it been regret?

Has it been grief?

Has it been the disappointment of a dream that never became reality?

Those voices can describe your pain.

But they cannot define your life.

There is only one voice with that authority.

The voice that still says,

*"Take heart."*

The voice that still says,

*"Do not be afraid."*

The voice that still says,

*"Come."*

Friends, the truest thing about Joseph was never that he was betrayed.

The truest thing was that God never abandoned him.

The truest thing about Peter was never that he sank.

The truest thing was that Christ reached for him.

And the truest thing about you is not the hardest chapter you have ever lived.

Not the diagnosis.

Not the loss.

Not the grief.

Not the regret.

The truest thing about you...

is that in Jesus Christ...

God is still coming toward you.

Across every distance.

Through every storm.

Into every pit.

Long before you recognize him...

he has already begun making his way toward you.

That has always been the deeper story.

It is the story of Joseph.

It is the story of Peter.

And by the grace of God...

it is our story, too.

Amen.

Prayers of the People