



*Then Joseph's brothers also wept, fell down before him and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear, I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. Genesis 50:18-21*

Many of you know that the story of Joseph and his family is one of my favorite Bible stories. It is long and contains many plot turns, interesting characters, and suspenseful situations. The story speaks to jealousy, revenge, sibling rivalry, family dysfunction, lying, betrayal, unjust punishments, government corruption, power struggles, faithfulness and ultimately, redemption.

I had the pleasure of teaching the confirmation class a few weeks back and whether it was by design or by coincidence, this story of Joseph was the appointed lesson for the evening! As I prepared to teach and explore it once again, I was struck by a connection at the end of this story (which is our Bible text noted above) with the 10 Commandments.

As Joseph's brothers come to him after their father had died, they tell him lies and seek his forgiveness. This, remember, comes after they have plotted to kill Joseph, have sold him into slavery, have needed to rely on him for provision during famine and are fearful that he will come to his senses and retaliate. But Joseph does not want retaliation or revenge -- Joseph wants a right relationship with his family.

And so he proclaims -- "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" So here's the connection for me: commandment number one says have no other gods; commandment number eight says don't bear false witness against your neighbor. Joseph, I believe, is speaking to both of these commandments in his response to his brothers.

Joseph knows that no matter how right or smart he is, he is not in the place of God. Joseph points out that he could not have known that his brothers' actions would have resulted in a scenario that benefitted a whole nation. Joseph sees his brothers in the best possible light (to paraphrase Luther's explanation of the 8th commandment) and allows God's redemptive power to shape his relationship with his family.

What do you think? If you can, read the whole story for yourself and see what connections come to mind for you (it starts in Genesis 35).

*Thank you gracious God for the stories of faith that are ours through your Word. Grant us insight and wisdom to see how these ancient stories impact the way we live today. We stand in awe that you continue to hold us and love us, even in the face of our unfaithfulness. We give you praise and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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