

Trinity 11 (2025)

A critic credited the success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*" to its family-friendly story line and catchy music.

The music is catchy (most of Webber's music is) and the story *as presented in the musical* is "family-friendly" . . . but the same can hardly be said of the actual story found in the Bible.

Quite the opposite is true. The story of Jacob (aka Israel) and his 12 sons is quite sorted. Here, you find a family about dysfunctional as they come.

To begin with, Israel shows favouritism. Today's Old Testament reading opens with these words: **"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children,"** and it showed.

Favouritism is likely to bring about rivalry and strife among siblings, and this is what had happened in Jacob's family. Don't do it.

But dysfunction had been going on in this family long before we picked up the story in today's reading. If you go back several chapters, you will find that the eldest of Israel's sons, Reuben, had had an affair with one of his father's concubines. Not, a good thing.

And then later in today's reading you find Joseph's brothers plotting to kill him. Dysfunction is writ large on every page of this family's story.

Perhaps you have known a dysfunctional family? Or perhaps you are part of such a family?

If the latter is true, don't let your circumstance define or consume you. Learn from the Joseph story that God is able to

overcome evil with good even in the worst of situations.

Dysfunction can be found not just in families but in government and in every other social institution.

If you read the local newspaper, you know that the Blue Ridge City Council is about as dysfunctional as any body can be.

In May of last year, the mayor and her husband filed lawsuits against three other council members. The suits eventually got dropped, but not before costing city taxpayers over \$100,000 in legal fees.

That is but one example, and I do not want to speculate on who was right and who was wrong in this dispute.

Another example, one more tragic in nature, is the school shooting in Minnesota this past

week in which two children were killed and 18 others injured. Here we find disfunction and disintegration in our American society.

Without wanting to sound simplistic, I want to suggest that there is a correlation between what we see going on in American society and the decline in religious faith and observance in this country over the past 60 or more years.

Perhaps Billy Graham said it best during a 1962 crusade held at McCormick Place in Chicago: **“It’s either back to the Bible or back to the jungle.”**

Who can doubt we are in the jungle when elementary schools in our own county must run students through scanning equipment before entering the building?

Where will it all end? I’m sure I don’t know. Pray for our nation.

But an even more important question is:
Where is God in the midst of family and societal dysfunctionality?

Well, the Jacob-Joseph saga may just help us answer that question.

Where was God in the midst of the dysfunction in Jacob's family? ///Answer:
Present and at work.

And that is what we have been seeing as we have made our way through Genesis over the past few weeks.

Just a quick recap of the narrative so far . . .

God creates the world good. But something happens. God's image-bearing creatures rebel and try to have it their own way.

Disharmony and dysfunction follow, beginning with Cain killing his brother Abel.

What does God do about this situation? ///
Destroy the world and start all over?

Well, He almost seems to have done this with the flood in Noah's day, but that was not His intent. Rather, it was to give his rebel race a re-start and a cleansed world. This, however, proved to be a short-term fix.

For you see, the problem was not with man's environment but with man's heart.

As the story moves along, God sets in motion a plan whereby the fallen sons and daughters of Adam might receive an inner transformation . . . a new heart.

He calls Abraham to be the progeniture of this new, restored humanity.

But, as we have seen over the past few weeks, Abraham's family is as messed up as any we see today.

Ultimately, it will be through one particular descendant of Abraham that men and women will get this new heart, this new inner transformation. That offspring being Jesus the Messiah.

Yet, on the way to arriving at that moment, God remains on the job, working through a host of dysfunctional people, often overriding their wicked acts for good. This is what we find happening in the Joseph saga.

After Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery, he should have disappeared from the narrative, but he does not. A real irony results.

God uses the brothers' treachery for their own preservation.

You know the story . . . many years later, when they were forced to go down to Egypt in search of grain because of a famine, there was Joseph.

God had sent him ahead to prepare for their need. God had over-ridden their thoroughly wicked act for good.

Fast forward now to the New Testament. Here we find something similar going on in the life of Jesus. Wicked men sent Jesus to the cross, but God, because He is a big God, uses their wicked act to bring about the salvation of the world.

In view of what happened with Joseph and later with Jesus: Where is God in the midst of our disfunction? /// Answer: at work and on the job, even though many times we don't see it.

You and I live in an age of overlapping kingdoms, at a strange point in history.

On one hand, the Kingdom of God has arrived. It arrived with the arrival of the King, Jesus the Messiah. Sin and death were defeated

on the cross. Moreover, what happened at Calvary is unrepeatable. No more offering for sin is needed.

But on the other hand, it is quite clear something is yet to happen, as dysfunction still abounds in the world.

Where is God at this present moment?

I have already told you: **At work and on the job.**

God now calls you and me to join Him at the point of the world's pain and to be a part of its healing.

We are called first to believe on Jesus . . . to give Him our allegiance . . . to bring our brokenness to the foot of the cross . . . to receive new hearts.

If you haven't done this, this can be your day of salvation. "Come every soul by sin oppressed, there is mercy with the Lord."

But *after* we have been to the cross, we are to do Jesus' works. "**As he is, so are we in this world,**" says 1 John 4:17.

St. Paul echoes this thought in Colossians 1:21 where he speaks of filling up "**that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.**"

What is he saying? /// That Christ's redemptive work on the cross was somehow incomplete and needs to be supplemented by our human efforts? /// No!

What he is saying is that those who have been pardoned, cleansed, healed and restored are to join their Lord in bringing the healing balm of the Gospel to the places of dysfunction and pain in the world.

Put another way, we are called to be *the Jesus people see*.

What kind of Jesus do people see when they look at you? At me?

To be ‘the Jesus people see’ is a tall order, but we don’t do this thing under our own steam. The Bible teaches that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are God’s Temple . . . the place where heaven and earth overlap.

I once saw an advertisement in a magazine which caught my eye. Pictured was a set of hands, palms outstretched. Underneath the caption read: **“These are no ordinary hands. These are the healing hands of a chiropractor.”**

The same and even more can be said of our hands as baptised members of Christ’s body: **“These are no ordinary hand. These are the**

healing hands of the risen, reigning and returning Christ.”

Take those no-ordinary hands out of your pockets and get busy using them.

Tasks abound in our broken and dysfunctional world.

None of us can do it all, but each can do something.

“We’ll work till Jesus comes.” May this be our theme and prayer as we leave this place this morning.