

Trinity 13 (2025)

It has been a turbulent week.

First, on Thursday we revisited the horrors of 9/11. For those alive at the time, the events of that day will forever be etched in their memories.

It was one of those defining moments in history. As those earlier remembered where they were when they heard the news of the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and of the shooting of President Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, so it was with those who lived through 9/11.

For the first time in history, America was attacked on her own soil. People watched their television screens in horror and disbelief as events unfolded. The 21st century had barely begun when it had its own “day of infamy.”

Katie Couric and Matt Laurer were hosting the Today Show that morning. Later, Miss Couric said: **“We had to lean on each other as we never had before.”**

Theirs was the response of people around the country; everyone had to lean on each other as they never had before.

Then, this past Thursday, we had yet another “day of infamy.” A young man, mentor to millions of young Americans, was struck down by an assassin’s bullet on a college campus in Utah.

Americans again found themselves watching in disbelief and having to lean on each other.

How could such a thing happen in a land where once free dialogue was not only permitted but encouraged?

It doesn't matter whether you agreed with everything Charlie Kirk said or not . . . this is a sad time for all Americans and the world. I know you join me in praying for his family.

Closer to home, late Friday night a dedicated officer in our neighboring town of McCaysville was assaulted and critically wounded by a young man of 26. Thankfully, the alleged perpetrator of this crime has been apprehended. We likewise pray this morning for Captain Brantly Worley and his family.

It's been a turbulent week.

9/11, the brutal and cowardly murder of Charlie Kirk and now the assault on Captain Worley remind us that something is not right in our world.

How are we to make sense of evil?

The Bible, while not answering all of our questions, gives us a clue, something to work with. It's there in Genesis, the book through which we have been making our way since the beginning of the Trinity season.

In review, the drama opens in Genesis 1 with the Spirit of God moving over the primal elements, bring order and life. The chapter ends with these words: **“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”**

But when we get to Chapter 3, the sky darkens. God's image-bearing creatures, whom He had placed in the garden to be wise caretakers, rebel and try to have it their own way. As a result:

--Sin and death come into the world.

--Humans are alienated from their Creator, shut out of the Garden of paradise.

--There is a fracturing of relationships between humans. Cain kills his brother Abel.

--Creation is affected. Thorns and weeds come up, making man's work toilsome.

As Paul will go on to say in Romans 8:22: **“the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain.”**

And, if we look around us, we know Paul is right . . . the Bible is right. This world is out of kilter and teeters. Rescue is needed.

But we also find good news in Genesis. There is the story of the Fall, but also of God's plan to redeem and save.

This plan begins with the call of Abraham, or Abram as he was known at the time. It will be through his family that the world torn apart by sin will be put back together.

“In you and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” God tells the patriarch and later his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, also known as Israel.

Ultimately this rescue of the human race will come through one particular seed of Abraham, Jesus the Messiah.

Much of what we find in the Old Testament is God setting the stage for His arrival. Today’s reading is in this genre.

Chapter 43, from which today’s reading comes, is the sequel to the earlier story of Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery.

By this time Joseph’s days of suffering are over. He is second in command to Pharaoh and is administering aid in a seven-year famine.

This famine is affecting not only Egypt but Caanan, the land where Joseph's brothers and father are.

It is for this reason the brothers come down to Egypt for the second time to buy grain, this time with their brother Benjamin.

There are many things I could say as we come to this chapter in the story, but I want focus on just one – **God's amazing, transforming grace.**

First, it is evident that this grace has been at work in the lives of Joseph's brothers.

Twenty years earlier they had been a totally disreputable lot.

Remember how they had conspired to kill Joseph?

Remember how their murderous plan had been narrowly stopped? /// Instead of killing their brother, at the urging of their eldest brother Ruben, they had done the kinder, gentler thing -- cast Joseph into a pit.

Remember what followed. They sat down to eat their lunch, no doubt in earshot of his cries for help! What a miserable lot they were!

Brother Judah in particular had a checkered past. He had mistaken his daughter-in-law Tamar for a roadside harlot and had gone in unto her.

Judah, moreover, was the one who urge that they sell Joseph to a band of Ishmaelites headed for Egypt. Why kill your brother when you can make a little money off him?

Now, 20 years later, we find Joseph's brothers better men.

Judah in particular seems changed. When their father Israel balked at letting Benjamin go down with them to Egypt, it was he who stepped forward and pledge his life in exchange for that of his brother.

“Of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever,”
Judah solemnly told his father Israel.

And Judah took this pledge seriously and acted honorably throughout the whole affair.

God’s amazing, transformative grace is writ large in the life of Judah and his brothers.

It should not be forgotten that David and later Christ came through the line of Judah.

God, moreover, is still in the business of using imperfect people to bring about His plan

of good in the world. He not only uses them but transforms them.

John Newton who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace” is a case in point. He was a slave boat captain and by his own admission a vile blasphemer. But God changed and used him.

The words we find in his hymn are autobiographical: “**Amazing grace (how sweet the sound) that saved a wretch like me!**”

The good news is that God is still in the business of saving wretches . . . making old men new, bad men good, good men better.

He can do a work of grace in your life and in the lives of those on whom you may have given up.

Don't write people off. Keep praying and witnessing. Never underestimate God and His transforming grace.

But it is not just in the lives of Joseph's brothers we see God's amazing, transforming grace at work. We see it in Joseph's own life.

Years earlier . . . I am speculating here . . . Joseph might have wanted to get even with his brothers, but that time had passed.

Instead of giving them what they deserve – a swift kick in the rear end or worse -- he feeds them! He returns a bad turn with a good. In so doing, he anticipates Christ who from the cross cried out, **“Father forgive.”**

More than that, the meal Joseph threw for his brothers might be thought of as an anticipation of the great Messianic banquet at the end of the age. This banquet will be peopled

entirely by the underserving, those saved by grace, yes by people like you and me.

As I prepare to close, let me urge you, if you have not already done so, to discover God's amazing, transforming grace in your life. Let Him put a new man or new woman in the suit you are wearing this morning.

And then after that, in this mixed-up, crazy, grace-less age (perhaps the age leading up to our Lord's Second Coming at which time He will set all wrongs to rights) dare to be a beacon of grace.

Reach out to the undeserving, perhaps to those on whom others have given up. Listen. Speak truth. Care. Give. Forgive. Feed. Serve. Witness.

Who knows what life you might touch? Don't go to heaven alone. Determine to bring someone with you!