

Sermon Transcript

A Canoe Trip Reflection

**Genesis 45:1-15 and Luke 15:1-7 | Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost |
August 24, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

Back in 2022, I led a canoe trip with all freshmen boys to the Boundary Waters **(PICTURE)**.

Memorably, one of the canoes swamped within the first 15 minutes on a calm stream, soaking our equipment, including all of the tents. We needed to dry out for a day on Shell Lake. It became known as the trip “To Shell and back” **(SLIDE)**.

This year, now a few years older and experienced, the majority of the group had been on a few trips since 2022 including two from that original group **(Picture)**.

This year, we entered on Fall Lake and would return to Fall Lake by Friday. Honestly, as long as history didn’t repeat itself and we “Don’t Fall in”, **(SLIDE)** I would have considered the trip a success.

One of the highlights was being joined by Paul and Bill, two other adults, and be able to talk with the group of Forest Lake seniors and hearing what they are up to. It was a highlight to hear what God is up to in their lives.

This trip was also about time with friends and fishing. Lots and lots of fishing **(SLIDE)**.

And because of that, this helped with our decision making—especially when we had to weigh the daily goals.

We were planning to paddle up to Basswood Falls and go exploring—one of the cooler sights available on this trip. But instead of bringing all of our stuff up to the Canadian border, we decided to claim a great campsite on the first day that we’d stay at for two nights.

On the second day, we hit the water early and headed to Basswood.

After two hours of paddling, it was time to look for a spot to take a stretch. In front of us was a tiny island with a nice shore to stop at. As we approached, a giant eagle took off from a tree right over our heads.

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The boys all got their fishing gear out and went to work. We watched as the eagle kept diving into the lake, trying to grab lunch. He had about as much success as the boys—empty-handed.

One thing that I noticed while docked on the island was just how strong the wind and current had pushed us. We definitely benefited from a tailwind to get there, and we still had a ways to go before getting to Basswood Falls.

We all had some lunch and the canoe guide, Grant, pulled us in for a conversation. His map (SLIDE of **map**)... laid out on the rock for us to see where we were (X on the map).

What were we gonna do??? Would we push forward to meet our goal and get to Basswood (**BASSWOOD**), or was there another plan we should consider?

Joseph's brothers, still back in Canaan with their father Jacob, were about to embark on a journey to reunite with a brother that they assumed was dead (**map of Canaan**).

This is a trip that they would take THREE times in order to get food due to the severe famine. Note, it does NOT take them 40 years to travel back and forth from Egypt to, what someday will be the promised land.

Jacob sends the ten brothers to buy food and Joseph recognizes them... but they have no reason to suspect that this is their brother. He is a high ranking official: pharaoh's second in command.

He gives them grain, but wants to see Benjamin, so he imprisons Simeon and tells them to bring their youngest brother back.

Once home, the brothers tell Father Jacob that Benjamin must come with because pharaoh's second in command, who's in charge of the food, insists upon it. They wait until they're out of food and then head back with double the money and other gifts to give this high ranking official.

Joseph is overcome with emotion at seeing Benjamin, but then sets up the brothers again by having a steward place his silver cup in Benjamin's bag to look like it's stolen.

This time, Judah begs for the official to show mercy. Finally, the official confesses his big secret. He reveals that HE is Joseph.

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Joseph has risen to the top. He's attractive, powerful, and clearly, others have deemed him to be blessed by God due to all of the good things that keep happening despites some of the most awful circumstances that got him there.

The pharaoh sees how much wealth and good fortune that Joseph has brought him, so he arranges a wedding and Joseph has two sons.

In Genesis 41, we get the birth announcements. Manasseh (SLIDE)... which means "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."

Do you think Joseph is still holding on to that grudge? His KID is literally named after the hardship and to help him FORGET his family.

What about the 2nd son? Ephraim (SLIDE). "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

Even though I should've died, God still provided for me.

These names have a deeper significance. (MAP) It's these two sons which will take the names of two of the 12 tribes of Israel someday when the Israelites enter the promised land—one takes Josephs and the other takes Levi, who as a priest, didn't inherit land, to go along with the other 10 brothers.

Just in the naming of his kids, Joseph articulates his basic theology. When things were bad, God didn't forget him. When things were good, God blessed him abundantly.

So, what's the theological statement he makes when he makes the big reveal to his brothers? Eye-for-an-eye? Will the brothers become his slaves?

Nope, out of my hardship and misfortunes, God did something amazing. Joseph recognizes that God was there. In fact, he even says "it was not YOU who sent me here, but God."

Is that how God operates? (pause) Then what do we do when God DOESN'T intervene to make sure everything turns out? There is more to the story.

Professor Tim McNinch writes, "even though Joseph credits God with using his brothers' treachery to save Egypt, **he still names their sin**, saying, "I am your brother, Joseph, **whom you sold into Egypt.**" There is some "truth" dropped on them.

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Human agency, responsibility, and accountability are not erased. Joseph forgives his brothers not because they are pawns in some unstoppable divine cosmic plan, but as a gift of grace.

Grace doesn't forget the evil. It doesn't excuse it. Grace releases the need for revenge and retribution. Grace leads to a future path of reconciliation.

Through the lens of Jesus, it's the parable of the lost sheep but turned on its head. At first, Joseph is obviously the lost sheep. God continually rescues Joseph.

But what about the brothers? Like a sheep, stuck in the mud (**SLIDE**), these brothers didn't realize they were the ones who needed to be saved. Saved from their guilt. Saved from their fear of vengeance. Saved from lives feeling not enough, overlooked, lost.

Joseph recognizes them. And that God was also with THEM all along. How might THAT transform our lives? It certainly made a difference on our canoe trip.

There was the map (**SLIDE**). Grant, the guide explained the time to get to Basswood was about two more hours. But, once we got there, we knew that the wind and current were working against us. It would definitely take much longer than four hours to get back to the campsite.

The adults presented the choices and let the boys ponder what we should do. The desire to do and see more was weighed with the desire to rest and fish.

They talked it over and agreed to head back. More time for fishing and not get exhausted for our last full day. It took at least 3 hours and another long rest stop on the way back. They agreed that night it was the right choice.

Then, the following day, the boys were faced with ANOTHER decision. Stay at a campsite that we already claimed, or move on to another one that might be better. Again, the boys listened to the options and agreed that the next site was worth going to (**SLIDE**). They had a sandy beach and caught over 20 fish.

It's easy to see God in the Boundary Waters (**SLIDE of 4 groups**). Maybe it's the eagle leading the way or the beauty of nature. Yet, after so many trips, where I see God is in the decisions. It's in the relationships and trust formed by working together. It's the gift of making wise choices by listening to your body.

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Each night, the boys were able to reflect where they saw God each day. These expressions of God moments showed the wisdom they were gaining and the depth of their faith. They know that God is with them in the challenges that they face also here at home, but that they give thanks to God through life's blessings.

A group decision on a canoe trip might not be comparable to Joseph seeing God in prison or through interpreting dreams, but... the common thread is that God is with us. Christ is always listening. Jesus shows us the path to have freedom within our own hearts.

May that depth of grace be with each of us, today, as we encounter a change in season—no matter what it is that's on our hearts today. Amen.