

Sometimes we hope that bad things would only happen to bad people or people we don't like but things do not work that way all the time. Sometimes, bad things happen to so many good people. And we ask why?

Life is full of questions and we don't find answers to them. Today's story of Joseph in Genesis 37 shows us a glimpse of that reality.

The bottom line is that the big brothers sold Joseph, their younger brother, to strangers. I know brothers can fight; relationships can go bad, especially if you were from a big family. In this particular family, there were 12 sons from four different mothers. And everyone in the family knew that this boy, Joseph, was their father's favorite.

I do not want to defend anyone here. But I was thinking of Joseph as I was reading the story. I was trying to understand what he may have gone through; I was trying to see if I could picture myself in his shoes; I was trying to see what I would do if I had to go through what he went through.

"I am not for sale; you are not for sale; no one should be for sale" is the catch phrase I found on a webpage of organization (<http://www.notforsalecampaign.org>) that works against human trafficking throughout the world.

They said 27 million people are enslaved today throughout the world. You may have seen on TV that many women are used as sex slaves in our backyards here in the Bay Area. And it happens in Asia, Africa, and all over the world.

So I don't know; when I was reading Joseph's story, the images of so many other victims I saw on TV came along.

There are evil forces hovering over us to capture our attention; there are evil spirits prevailing around us to sneak into our hearts and minds; it doesn't matter who you are, once we follow those evil forces, we do bad things.

But still, my thought was with Joseph. This poor man was stripped of the fine clothes his father put on him and pushed into a pit. Just imagine yourself stuck in that dark muddy underground hole.

But the ordeal continued as he was raised up there to be sold and go through many other turns and twists.

Of course, we know how Joseph's story ends: Joseph becomes the prime minister of Egypt and saves his whole family. If you read Genesis 45 and 50, Joseph, the prime minister, says to his brothers, "Don't feel bad for what you did to me; in fact, it was not you but God who sent me here in Egypt; you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result."

There was a happy ending. Joseph became a patriarch not only of Israelites but of all of us. No wonder that it is one of our most favorite stories in the Bible.

I don't think Joseph ever knew that he would get through what he went through when he was going through them. When he was going into the field, I don't think he already knew that he would be stripped of by his brothers. No!

When he was thrown into the pit; I don't think he knew ahead of time what would happen. It happened when it happened and he knew when it happened. That means, each time this poor boy went from one hell to another. Even though we say and believe that God makes all things work together for good to those who love God, it surely is hard to accept.

When the going gets rough and tough in life, sometimes we feel that it only gets worse! When it rains, it pours.

You may have read or heard this story; the man in this story accepts everything that happens as something God does to him. And he said, "It is not appropriate for me to question God for the things that happen to me."

He got married and his wife ran away with another man. His daughter was deceived by a jerk. His son was lynched. A fire burned down his barn. A cyclone blew away his home. A hail storm destroyed his crops, and the banker foreclosed on his mortgage, taking his farm. Yet at each stroke of misfortune, he never blamed God.

After a time, penniless but still submissive to God, he landed in the county poorhouse. One day the overseer sent him out to plow a potato field. A bolt of lightning melted the plowshare, stripped most of his clothing from him.

When he recovered consciousness, he got up slowly on his knees, raised his eye toward heaven and, then, for the first time in his life, said, "Lord, this is ridiculous; don't you think, "Enough is enough?"

But there is one thing we should not forget about Joseph. He was a dreamer. People tried to harm and kill him but one thing they could not kill was the dream itself.

In every generation, there are those who want to kill dreamers. John F Kennedy dreamed of a “new frontier” and Lee Harvey Oswald’s bullet cut him down in Dallas. But his bullet couldn’t kill his dream.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s most famous speech was all about having a dream—we know his body was gunned down by James Earl Ray but his dream still rings true to us.

Maybe the best example of all is Jesus; he was a dreamer. Even though Pontius Pilate and all other people were offering a sleazy plea-bargain to kill his dream, Jesus stuck with his dream.

When the going gets tough and rough, I know there are challenges; there are even threats to our faith; but we dare to dream; we do not want to see ourselves drown.

Jesus says to Peter, “Don’t be afraid. Take heart. It is I. I am with you.”

We went to Angel Island last week. One thing I cannot forget is the perspective I was able to have. On the top of the small mountain/island, I was able to see all of the Bay Area. It was beautiful. Being in the middle of the Bay, I felt like I was in the middle of everything, watching everything that went on in the area.

That was probably what Jesus was doing when Peter was screaming at the waves of the water. But Jesus knew what was going on; Jesus was there; Jesus is always in the middle of our life; he sees us and helps us even if we are not aware of it.

When the going gets tough, I know we fear; we get concerned; we worry. But know this: God is there with us. Take heart! Don't lose your faith; do not give up your dreams. Amen.