

There are a lot of things I love about living in Virginia. Before this weekend, I would have said the mild winters, but here we are with more snow than I've seen in eons, even in Michigan. No, I have come to love so much about living here, but y'all (see? I even love saying y'all now), I have one really big pet peeve, and some of you know this because you've heard me complain about it. I don't know if this is a Virginia thing or a Hampton Roads thing, but man is there a fascination with calling roads by numbers and not by names!!! I swear you could have a conversation with someone asking for directions and they'll be like well take 17 to 134 to 143 to 8,090 and then eventually you'll find the 205 and you'll be right there, and the other person is just standing there like...what? We don't do this in Michigan unless it's a highway, regular roads get called by their regular names, even if that road cuts across counties and is miles long. And I know, I know, these roads change their names depending on where they are, but still! It's so many numbers!!

Perfect example. Two summers ago, the kids and I were driving back from Kairos and there was a massive accident on 64 right near Toano. I texted the parents letting them know we were going to be late, and I'm exhausted and getting really stressed out because we've been driving for five hours, and everyone is ready to come home. The text thread goes nuts, well

if you're near Toana get off and then you can take 143 to 134 and that will take you right into Newport News. I don't even know if those are the actual numbers that got said. I texted back and literally said, I have no idea what that means. It was total jibberish to me and so we sat there, until one of the parents called me and was like, you have to find this road and that will become Jefferson. That...I could understand, otherwise, I was completely lost, having no clue how long this journey was going to take or where it would ultimately end up, I just hoped it would get us home.

That's the thing about journeys, we're all going to go about them in different ways. We're going to use different words and different routes and some of us are going to think the directions make total sense and others are going to just spin in circles praying that eventually they find an exit. It's hard, feeling like you're on the road and not sure where it's going to take you, and yet sometimes, once we get where we're going, we're able to look back and reflect with grace, with patience, with gratitude, and hopefully a little bit of laughter. That Kairos trip? We eventually got off at Toano which gave me the image of Garrett leaning halfway out my car window to see around a semi to make sure that no insane drivers were coming up the shoulder and yelling at me, go Pastor Tina, go go, we got this. But I didn't

appreciate that until I was home, the kids were handed off to their parents and I was out of the car.

We jump into the Joseph story basically at the end of it this morning, and I get it, the lectionary organizers want to make a point. They want to connect Joseph's conversation with his brothers to Jesus' teachings about forgiveness so we can wrap all of this up in a neat little bow and say, voila, Jesus says forgive! Here we have Joseph forgiving his brothers! Easy peasy, sermon squeezy. But...I am just not that comfortable with the simplicity of that, because it makes forgiveness seem...well, simple. It makes it seem like if we just have enough faith, we can be like Joseph and if we don't do these things, well then the forgiveness train is leaving the station and we're going to be left waiting on the platform.

So let's talk a little bit about what gets us to where we are in Genesis this morning. Joseph is the second youngest of Jacob's 12 sons. He is only one of two boys born from Jacob's marriage to Rachel, his one true love, while the rest were from his marriage to Leah, a marriage that resulted from his father-in-laws cunning and not from any point of love and care. Now, I don't know much about parenting, but I think it's safe to say that overtly treating one kid as the favorite over the rest isn't going to go very well, and that's exactly what Jacob does. Joseph is pampered, lavished with love, and

ultimately given a coat of many sleeves, or colors if you're Andrew Lloyd Weber. The other 11 aren't thrilled about this, and to make matters worst, Joseph isn't the humblest of guys. He boasts and brags about the dreams he has which show him that his brothers will some day bow down to him and he will rule over him. I mean even as a youngest child, I feel pretty safe in saying this kid is obnoxious.

Now, does that mean he needs to be sold into slavery while his brothers fake his death and make Jacob think he's gone? No, probably not, but that's what happens. Fast forward through some chaos with Potiphar's wife, an arrest, time in prison, interpretation of other prisoner's dreams, which leads him to being presented to Pharaoh as one with wisdom who can soothe his mind from unsettling dreams he has been having, and Joseph finds himself as the number two guy in all of Egypt, helping the country and those around them survive and almost thrive through a time of deep famine and despair, and thus we find ourselves at our first lesson.

Joseph's brothers, having heard that there is food in Egypt, make their way to Pharaoh's palace and beg for help, but recognition only flows in one direction. Joseph recognizes them, but they don't recognize him. There's a lot of intricate messing with them that happens, but ultimately we arrive at this point in the story. Joseph reveals himself to them and they are terrified

that now they're definitely going to starve because there is no way he's going to help them after everything that they did. And yet Joseph, after a lot of years to reflect and grow up in maturity and in faith is able to see the journey with a healthy perspective. This journey, hard though it was, brought him here, to where he is able to help thousands of people survive a famine. He is able to recognize where God has been in the journey and how God has moved with Joseph through the difficult to arrive at a place of stability and happiness. It doesn't make everything that happened ok. It doesn't take away the years of pain, suffering, or rejection, but it does allow him to look back and see that he has finally hit a point in the journey where he can take the exit ramp and find a road towards forgiveness.

But we all know that that road is winding and difficult and full of stop and go traffic, where sometimes we sit for eons in one spot and other times we zip along, but we all get to the exit at different points and we all get there in different ways, along different roads and paths. Scripture makes it sound very cut and dry, very easy. Jesus says forgive and thus we should, done. And I mean, sure, we do need to daily work on forgiveness, to not let hatred and grudges sit on our hearts weighing us down to the point where we're not able to see past anything but our own angst, but there has to be room for grace along the way, there has to be room for patience. I don't think that

Joseph was sitting in a jail cell, rotting away, fearing he may be executed, and thinking ya know, I forgive my brothers for putting me in this situation, and look at how God is here in the awful. He got there through a long journey and that is what we have to remind ourselves of. Forgiveness and treating one another with grace and love is always going to be the goal, but we have to be ok with the fact that the road is long.

More often than not when the road gets hard and we can't see the end point or someone is giving us directions in what sounds like code, we just give up and say, this isn't worth it. We write one another off and say we're going to sit with this anger, this hatred, this grudge because dang it we deserve to and frankly that's just the easier road. But we all know it's not. It is much harder to sit with that much roiling inside of you. It doesn't mean the work, the journey isn't going to be tough, but ultimately it gets us to a place where we can look back and see all the places where God has moved with and through us as we've traveled.

One of the Bible study folks reminded me of the Rascal Flatts song, "Bless the Broken Road," and some of the lyrics are, "I set out on a narrow way many years ago hoping I would find true love along the broken road. But I got lost a time or two, wiped my brow and kept pushing through, I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you. God blessed the broken

road that led me straight to you.” Now, take the romantic sentimentality out of it, and you can see Joseph here. The broken road led him to success and strength, to a deeper faith, and ultimately back to his family, and hopefully by the end point he saw that it was worth it to get there, to see it with hindsight and say, this was awful, but I made it, and God has been here at every signpost, every exit sign, every wrong turn.

God is in the journey, y’all. Sometimes we have no idea where we’re going or if we’re even on the right track. Sometimes the numbers get jumbled and we want to just pull over and say I quit, I am making my life right here. We fear God has abandoned us or calls us to the impossible. Keep going. Keep driving. God never promised us an easy journey, but God did promise that no matter where we are, no matter where we go, God is going to be there, working through the hard to find a pathway to grace. Forgiveness for ourselves and for others is not easy, but it is possible, it just takes a lot of directions. Wherever you find yourself this morning along the interstate of faith, know you do not drive alone, and you do not drive in vain. God is going to get you there, over bumps and cracks and missed exits, and when you arrive, when we all arrive, may we look back over how far we have traveled, take a deep breath and say, I didn’t think I would make it, but God bless the broken road that brought me here. **AMEN!!!**