Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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March 4, 2021
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Here comes that dreamer” (Genesis 37:20).

Gen 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a: Matt 21:33-43, 45-46

The opening line of the story of Joseph tells us the whole story. “Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons.” We feel the envy of his siblings rising to hatred and we know something terrible is about to happen. Only God can salvage this tragedy and turn it into salvation history. Joseph is the beloved son whose dreams and rainbow coat make him intolerable to his brothers. Their envy and hatred set in motion the saga of slavery in Egypt and the exodus of the Chosen People.

Matthew mines this theme of jealousy and murder in another central image in the Bible for God’s covenant with his people, the vineyard from Isaiah 5:1-7. Other parallels will appear in the Gospels about the beloved son sold for silver, stripped of his seamless cloak and crucified. Matthew’s long parable of the vineyard tenants is an allegory that summarizes the long history of murdering prophets and then the son, bringing down on the nation the devastation of the Jewish-Roman War.

What can account for the brutal rejection of Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees? Why did they oppose him at every turn and for the smallest of ritual infractions? Why did they question his birth, attack his hill country roots, his common layman’s status? Why did these blood brothers collude with the hated Herodians and the occupying Romans to hand over one of their own to a shameful death? Why did Jesus’ message of compassion and mercy make him deserve to die?

His ecclesial critics said he broke the law, scandalized the people, ate with sinners, undermined their authority and threatened the temple. Or was he simply too beautiful, gracious, popular, a brilliant storyteller and miracle worker? Did his light shine too brightly in contrast to their own professional importance, practiced virtue and dedication to the Law? What do experts do when dreamers wearing rainbows make their academic gowns seem drab?

Envy is a deadly sin because it is eats at the core of our self-image. Without introspection it is so obsessive it becomes hatred. Pathological jealousy often ends in murder-suicide when the death of the victim breaks the spell and opens the eyes of the murderer. The death of Jesus passed judgment on the world for rejecting God's most precious gift. The resurrection of Jesus showed how limitless God's mercy is. Matthew offers his verdict by quoting Psalm 118: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes.*

God turns tragedy into the salvation of the world. Human ignorance and sin are prelude to grace and wisdom. We may ask why so much attention is devoted to the scribes and Pharisees. Was it to reveal the depth of God's mercy? We are told that the greatest love possible is to lay down your life for your friends. The Good News is that Jesus laid down his life for his enemies.

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