

## 19. How can any good come out of it?

### Genesis 50:19-21

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

A lecturer at theological college made a very striking observation about the shape of the lives of many Bible heroes: they are tick shaped. There is a short down stroke, then a long upstroke. You could visualise it as a hockey stick too.

Joseph is a classic example. His brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. At first he flourished as the chief servant of one of Egypt's highest military commanders. But then his master's wife falsely accused him of raping her. He languished in prison for years. That was the down stroke of the tick.

Then came the up stroke. One day Pharaoh, King of Egypt, had a dream. An ex-fellow inmate remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams. Joseph was summoned, and within minutes was appointed prime minister of Egypt. Soon he was administering food aid for famine-struck people far beyond the borders of Egypt.

That's what brought his brothers down to Egypt. At first, they didn't recognise Joseph. Eventually he revealed himself to them. His father, Jacob, came down for a moving family reunion in Egypt.

At last, Jacob died. The brothers were terrified. Would Joseph seize his opportunity for revenge?

Thankfully for them, Joseph understood his life story from God's perspective. They had intended to harm him; but through their evil actions, God was at work to save many people. Unwittingly, the brothers had worked to fulfil God's plan.

The same pattern is even more vivid in the cross of Christ. Judas, Caiaphas and Pilate all worked freely against Jesus; but God was using those very actions to save many people.

Look out for the tick shape in the Bible: Joseph experiences slavery and imprisonment, but is vindicated to high office; Jesus experiences crucifixion, but is vindicated in the resurrection and ascension; King David is banished, but eventually takes the throne a far greater man than he could have been without his years on the run from Saul.

Look out for the tick shape emerging through the current tragedies in West Cumbria. Bringing good out of evil is a classic hallmark of the living God. Let us pray and expect to see the upstroke!