

Pastor Jon's Sermon from February 20, 2022.

“Forgiveness Between Joseph and his Brothers”

Text: Genesis 45-3-11, 15

Someone once said, “the problem with family is... that we all have one.” Families can be wonderful and life giving, but sometimes families break down... they fight, get jealous, blame one another, and hold grudges. It is often over earthly things like money, politics, an inheritance, or jealousy.

In the book of Genesis alone, people that God chose to carry on the family name of Abraham, lied, cheated, stole, got jealous, and wanted to get rid of siblings, like Joseph in our first reading, who was sold into slavery by his brothers to the Egypt.

But God's Word calls us into a new way of thinking today... from thoughts of revenge and retribution to thoughts of forgiveness and reconciliation. And as we shared in Bible study this week, forgiveness is process. It takes time and healing. It takes prayer.

In our first lesson, we have the conclusion of the Joseph story in Genesis 45. If you recall from Sunday school, Joseph was considered his father, Jacob's, favorite son. Jacob spent the most time with Joseph because he was the youngest... 17 at the time. Jacob even had a special coat of many colors made for him. It makes me think of Donny Osmond in the Broadway musical, ‘Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat’. Joseph's brothers thought that their father loved Joseph more than them.

One night, Joseph had a dream that he was in the fields with his brothers, and that the grain they tied together bowed down to the grain Joseph tied. The next night, Joseph had another dream that the sun, moon and stars bowed down to him. These dreams made both his brothers and father mad... that Joseph is some sort of king they would bow down to. So, to preserve the peace, Jacob sent his sons out into the fields with the sheep and kept Joseph home.

One day, Jacob sent Joseph out to check on his brothers tending the sheep. When Joseph got near, the brothers hatched a plan and grabbed this dreamer... Joseph, and threw him into a pit, and sold him into slavery in Egypt. The brother's took his coat, put goat's blood on it, and lied to their father saying that that Joseph was killed by a wild animal.

Because of Joseph's gift of dream interpretation, he eventually rose up the ranks in Egypt, eventually to 2nd in command to Pharaoh. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream of fat and skinny cows prepared Egypt for a drought of 7 years. Joseph came up with a plan to store up food. Other countries would even come to Egypt to buy food during the drought.

In our text for today, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers who came to Egypt to get food during the drought. Joseph asked, "Is my father still alive?" It is I, Joseph, the one you sold into slavery. They were speechless. Probably fearful of what Joseph might do to them. Then Joseph kissed his brothers and wept upon them, and after that they started talking again. Joseph saw the bigger picture. He believed that the evil his brothers intended for him was a part of God's plan to preserve life for the Jewish people. Joseph says in Genesis 50:20, "Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."

The conflict between Joseph and his brothers is resolved when Joseph chooses not to take revenge for past injustices but makes peace with those who mistreated him and thereby reunites the family.

Then in our Gospel, Jesus teaches the crowd of his disciples in Luke's Sermon on the Plain a fresh way of how the world should work. Jesus speaks of a way of God that is lavish and full of grace.

Jesus teaches to love your enemies, turn the other cheek, give to everyone who begs from you, and do to others as you would have them do to you. Lend without expecting anything in

return. Do not judge. Do not condemn. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Isn't this what we pray in the Lord's Prayer? Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Because we have been forgiven exponentially by Jesus, we too ought to forgive. Forgiveness is a mark of being a Christian.

And yet why do we withhold forgiveness? Why do we wait to see if the person says sorry first? Which may never happen. Why do we hold grudges? Because we are human. But did Joseph forgive his brothers without an apology? Yes. He forgave them in his heart and saw how God made good out of a horrible situation. It takes a lot of grace to get to the place where Joseph was.

Forgiveness also heals us. Forgiveness helps us move forward. My brother told me once that he was really hurt after his divorce... still is. But once he could pray for his ex by name, he knew he was healing. It was a sign of forgiveness.