

“Traveling the Road from Revenge to Reconciliation”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph, is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father of Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt, come down to me, do not delay.

You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there – since there are five more years of famine to come – so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty. And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his Brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Go, go, go Joseph you know what they say
Hang on now Joseph you'll make it some day
Don't give up Joseph fight till you drop
We've read the book and you come at on top

Go, go, go Joseph you know what they say
Hang on now Joseph you'll make it some day
Sha la la Joseph you're still in your prime
You and your dreams are ahead of your time

This is a few lines from one of the songs from the Andrew Lloyd Weber’s musical, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat”. Don’t worry, I am not going to burst out in song and dance. But, this happens to be both of my daughter’s favorites especially when they were growing up. This rich story is full of love, anger, revenge, forgiveness and reconciliation. Yes, Andrew Lloyd Weber takes some twists and turns in the retelling of the story, which first originates in the Bible in Genesis 37.

Jacob had twelve sons. It is clear that Joseph was his father’s favorite son, which was shown in the gift of the coat of many colors. He was also given a gift from God of interpreting dreams. Joseph is not shy about telling his brothers about both of these things. It is no wonder that through the years his brothers become jealous! This jealousy has led to hatred! They begin to devise a plan to kill Joseph.

After they throw him in a pit, they end up selling him off to some merchants, who take him to Egypt. He is then sold into slavery. It is while he is serving at his master’s house that he is falsely accused of something and ends up in prison. As Joseph settles in behind bars, word gets around of Joseph’s gift of interpreting dreams. This news travels to Pharaoh’s palace and Joseph is summoned to help Pharaoh interpret his troubling dreams. Joseph explains that there will be seven years of abundant harvests and

then seven years of famine. Egypt needs to save the extra produce so they will have food during the famine. This all becomes true. Pharaoh is so grateful for Joseph's help because he saves Egypt. Pharaoh makes Joseph his right hand man!

All seems to be going well until Joseph's brothers show up in Egypt. They have come looking for food! They have no idea who Joseph is. It is no wonder, as I am sure he was speaking Egyptian and wearing the finest clothes. But, Joseph remembers them! I wonder if this scene has played out in his mind, a thousand times. It is no wonder that he immediately goes into wanting revenge. His brothers have caused huge heartache. It is understandable that he wants to hurt them – just as bad as he has been hurt! Who would blame him for this? How could he ever trust them after what they did to him! How could his own family do this to him?

The brothers are sent back to Canaan and are required to return to the palace with their brother Benjamin. They arrive at the home of their father, Jacob. The brothers explain that the official person, who was second in command to Pharaoh has summoned Benjamin to return with them. They unpack the food and return to Egypt. As Joseph meets them, he has one of his servants carry out his plot of revenge. His servant hides a silver chalice in Benjamin's bag. The brothers load up more food and begin to return home. The palace guards stop them. The silver cup is found. Benjamin is arrested and put into jail.

The brothers return to Joseph to beg him to release their brother. Judah explains that this loss of Benjamin would kill their father. He asked to switch places and free Benjamin.

At that point, Joseph faces his brothers and it is though a light bulb is turned on. It is though God puts a mirror in front of Joseph's face to see what he is doing is wrong! Joseph dismisses everyone except his brothers. He wants this moment to be between him and his family. He begins to weep.

The connection to Pharaoh vanishes and he says in Hebrew, (pronounced AAA-NEE-YO-SAPHE (aaa – need – to – shaped) - "I am Joseph". The brothers don't understand. They are still confused because they never imagined that Joseph would end up here, as Pharaoh's second in command.

Joseph tells them again that he is their brother, Joseph! Joseph clarifies that the brothers should not be concerned. He will not seek revenge for what they did to him. Do not blame yourself for selling me into slavery. God is the one that sent me here. God gave me a gift so I could save Egypt as well as your children and your children's children!

Was it God's plan to make Joseph a slave and end up in prison, to suffer heartache? NO! That was the actions of others! However, God puts plans into place to use Joseph's gifts of interpreting dreams to help save himself and others.

Jill Duffield, editor of the Presbyterian Outlook, says about this scripture: "We've got grief, anger, relief, frustration, love, fear – the roiling gamut of human feelings are woven into this story, and I find this messy display a relief. God utilizes our whole selves, our whole lives, all our complex feelings and relationships to make manifest divine truth and will."
[\(https://trinitypreschurch.org/hard-work-wearing-love/\)](https://trinitypreschurch.org/hard-work-wearing-love/)

God manifests divine truth and will. Joseph was determined to plot revenge on his brothers! He wanted them to pay for his pain, which they caused. He wanted to hurt them just like they hurt him. Yet, the power of the Holy Spirit comes through and allows reconciliation. God's divine truth and will allows grace and healing of the brokenness. God's presence is in that moment.

When have you had an encounter with someone that changed your understanding, your mind, your actions? For me, I tend to put up a wall and avoid those who have hurt me. Especially, those people who are supposed to love me. I push them away. I find it difficult and messy when I need to confront someone and address the hurt that they have caused. Yet, does revenge - wanting to return one hurt for another really help anything? God calls us to grant grace and restore the brokenness with forgiveness. I don't believe God is asking us to forget the hurt but forgive it. This grace is about love and peace.

What is it about love that can be difficult? It is easy to love people when we enjoy their company. For the most part, it is easy to love our children, spouses, parents and dear friends. The people who bring us joy and it is fun to be in their company. Even our furry family members, who greet us at the door every night after we come home from a long day, are dearly loved by us.

But what about the people who get under your skin and can get you upset? The ones who you can only take for a short time before they are on your last nerve? The people, who have deeply hurt us by their actions or words? The people who make us angry and mad. It is hard to find love in your heart for them and be able to forgive them. The Holy Spirit will give us the power to open up our eyes so that we can see that God can reconcile any relationship and restore it.

So many things are difficult in our country right now. There is a lot of finger pointing in Washington these days. No matter what political side you are on, there are hurtful and nasty things being said on both sides. We have all kinds of racial tension to the point where people are getting killed. And, there is the pandemic on top of all this. I know we all want this to end! We want it to go away and it doesn't look like that is going to happen for a long time. I am angry that it is August! Where has this year gone? I feel like I lost this year! It is common for us as humans to want to blame someone for our hurt. We want them to have to pay for it! I really don't have anyone to blame for my anger!

In our society and our world, may we be open to the manifestation of the divine truth and will. Thanks be to God for this amazing story of Joseph who reminds us that God gives us that grace to seek reconciliation, especially in our messy crazy world. Amen.

