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Rev. Debra McGuire

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Genesis 45:3-11, 15’ Luke 6:27-38

February 16, 2025 – 7th Sunday after Epiphany

***Genesis 45:3-11, 15***

***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.***

***4Then 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. 5And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6For 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. 7God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8So it was not you who sent me here but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9Hurry 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. 10You 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. 11I 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.’***

***15And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them, and after that his brothers talked with him.***

***Luke 6:27-38***

***“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; 28bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. 29If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.***

***32“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

***37“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”***

***24“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
25“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.
“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.***

***26“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.***

***“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; 28bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.***

Jesus barely takes a breath in-between last week’s text and this week’s text from Luke. In last week’s reading, Jesus came down from the mountain with his disciples and saw the crowds, great multitudes, who came to hear and be healed by his touch. Jesus healed them and after, began to teach with the beatitudes. Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, who weep, when people hate and exclude and revile you; and woe to you others…

Imagine the scene, crowds, multitudes at the base of the mountain, everyone moving about trying to reach and be near Jesus. The sounds, the folks who had been healed wandering, amazed and wondering what just happened. The folks hoping to get close hoping for the same amazement. Maybe some people left the area and didn’t think about it anymore, they just tuned out; maybe some stayed to rest; some hung out close to the Man like groupies, like at a modern day rock concert. That crowd energy that reminds you that there is no where else you’d rather be!

Put yourself right there if you can. When Jesus continues with “But I say to you who are listening…” are you still there at the edge of the stage right then? Have you been healed and heard the Blessings and Woes and even so, decided to hang around because that crowd energy gives you hope? “You who are listening” could be any of us or none of us.

These last six weeks, the season of Epiphany has been one full of learning more and more about Jesus, and getting closer and closer to the man and closer and closer to the reality of the divinity in him. For we black-and-white binary thinking humans, we might be more confused than ever, wishing we knew once and for all if Jesus was a man or if he was divine. Can we just have one answer?

No, we can’t. Being Christian means that we are part of a tradition that believes that one particular person, a real live historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, was a man and was divine. Not one or the other. Both. I’m sure those around him in the scripture from the past six weeks were experiencing the excitement, the wonder, the worry even, the newness, the confusion and simultaneous joy that he brought about wherever he went. Even thousands of years later, running into everything about Jesus for the first time is pretty overwhelming. It would be normal to do just what the multitude at the base of the mountain did. Some stayed. Some tuned out. To those who are listening, Jesus kept talking. Without a break, Jesus gives real life examples of some of those blessed and warned circumstances.

None of the circumstances – being struck on the cheek, having my coat taken away, giving to everyone, let people take away what is mine – these are not things I can do! It would take a lifetime of maturity and development for me to not act in some kind of retaliatory way. I might not hit someone who hit me, but I’m not likely to offer them the other cheek! If someone takes my coat, I might get as far as deciding they really needed it, but I’m not likely to give them my shirt also. This lesson is hard!

While it doesn’t get us off the hook, it is a little bit helpful to learn that Jesus is speaking to “you” plural. He’s speaking to the group. By speaking to the group, Jesus makes these statements a group effort. In a group, there may be many people who have experienced poverty, hunger, lack of warmth or clothing, been hurt by someone else. “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” By addressing these statements, Luke’s version of the 10 commandments, to a community, Jesus is moving them away from transactional behavior to behavior that will benefit the group. Jesus is moving them away from the tendency to only worry about ones self toward a more empathetic and merciful stance as a community. These statements about how best to treat others end up being the path to a healthier community made up of healthier and more compassionate individuals.

A group with a culture of generosity, mercy, compassion, empathy will help its own individuals and will be attractive to others, and will be participants in a new kind of society. God’s society.

When individuals receive mercy, they know how to show mercy. When we recognize mercy, we recognize the benefit. “Mercy changes the way we see ourselves and how we see others (which in turn changes the way we act and treat one another). Mercy flows in the opposite direction of judgement and condemnation; mercy spurts out as forgiveness and generosity.”2

The text from Genesis today is an example of loving ones enemies that makes a good pairing with the new testament scripture for today. But it is not as simple as it looks.

By only reading the portion from Genesis assigned by the lectionary, we have left out a lot of context that might have helped us see the whole story better, and understand the generalities of the description of forgiveness told in the Luke text.

The portion of Genesis read for today is the grand climax of the story of Joseph and his brothers. You may know this story from musical theater or church camp songs or theater, or maybe actually from the biblical story. Jacob had 12 sons. Joseph was the youngest, and his father’s favorite. His father Jacob even had a beautiful robe made for him, made of many colors. Joseph’s brothers weren’t crazy about him because of the favoritism he received from their father. Joseph told his brothers about a few dreams he had, where it seemed as if all of the brothers would be bowing down to Joseph. They really thought Joseph was full of himself. One day when they were all out the brothers stripped Joseph of his robe and threw him into a pit. And when some Midianite traders came by the brothers actually sold Joseph to them. The brothers then spilled animal blood onto the robe of Joseph that they took, and took the bloodied robe to their father, so Jacob would think that Joseph had been killed.

Joseph was enslaved and suffered a great deal, was thrown into prison because of a false accusation, where he began to be known for his interpretation of dreams. Eventually though this skill brought him to the attention of Pharoah and so this boy from Canaan sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers became someone who was highly regarded in Egypt by the Pharoah.

Meanwhile back in Canaan life was pretty rough. After some time, the brothers had reason to be back in Egypt and ran into their brother Joseph many times, although Joseph pretended he did not know them. The scripture we read today, is the grand moment when Joseph reveals himself to them – a grand example of forgiving the brothers who should have been his enemies.

At least that’s what it looks like without the context of the whole story. In truth, just a few chapters back, Joseph made life really miserable for his brothers by accusing them of being spies and of planting evidence to prove it; and has made his brothers fear for their lives and the life of their father Jacob back in Canaan.

So when Joseph said to them finally, “I am Joseph,” I wonder what went through their minds?!

Joseph asked after their father, but the brothers couldn’t even answer him. Joseph didn’t let them off the hook completely and say all was forgotten. But he did forgive them and became a witness to them of God’s part in his change of heart. ***“I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.”*** “Whom you sold into Egypt.” In other words, Joseph doesn’t side-step the fact of what happened. But here is the connection to the Luke text – Joseph does not act as if the relationship and behaviors are transactional – you did this to me so I will do this to you. Joseph does forgive, along with the naming of the truth. Joseph instead names the truth – whom you sold into Egypt – but also provides a greater vision or wider perspective on the events.

Rather than tell the story of being violently abused by his older brothers, about the experience of his life in slavery, about being wrongly accused and imprisoned, or even boasted about how clever he had been – he “drops his guard, he works to make it right and he tells the truth wrapped in God’s loving intention. “God sent me ahead of you.”1

Joseph gained a wider perspective by his own experiences and recognition of God’s presence even through difficulties and unfairness. This new perspective, recognition of God’s presence gave Joseph the ability to tell the truth about wrongs or harm without judgment without meeting like with like. Joseph recognized that his own story was intertwined with and a major part of the life stories of so many others – his brothers, his family, his people, and even with the Egyptians.

I wonder if we have stories to tell about harms or wrong doing or pain that can be told in a new way. That can be told with truth *and* a wider perspective. A wider perspective that is “wrapped up in God’s loving intention.”

Joseph’s story is paired with the Luke text in order to show that loving your enemies does not mean putting up with more harm, it does not mean continue to suffer. Loving your enemies, with truth telling along with the recognition of God’s work in a larger story, is the way forward.

Let’s pray,

1<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-02-17/genesis-453-11-15-3/>

Jenista, Meg, February 2025

2 <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-02-17/luke-627-38-3/>

Harmon, Chelsey, February 2025

3<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/seventh-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-627-38-3>

Shore, Mary Hinkle, February 2025

4<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/seventh-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-genesis-453-11-15-3>

Timothy McNinch