

Scripture Readings and Sermon

August 16, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 42:1-8 & 45:1-8 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Once again, the lectionary skips large portions of text to focus on the reuniting of Joseph and his brothers in chapter 45. While today's readings skip over Joseph's long journey through false imprisonment and dream interpretation to become Pharaoh's advisor, it does add a reading from chapter 42 to provide a reason for the brothers to be in Egypt to reconcile with Joseph. Joseph's brothers may have been forgiven but it did not come easy. Since the focus of the lectionary is to illustrate Joseph's forgiveness based on an understanding of God's providence, chapters 43 and 44 which deal with a bit of payback by Joseph is omitted. In the larger story of Joseph, forgiveness is a secondary theme to the primary theme of God's plan of salvation. Knowing that a famine would threaten Jacob/Israel, God provided Joseph with the gift (dream interpretation) and the calling (Pharaoh's advisor) to provide salvation not only for Jacob's family (42:1-5) but for the entire region (42:6-8). Joseph explains this to his brother when he reveals himself 45:5-8. Egypt was not yet the home of captivity but the means of salvation. Things only go bad when they forget to leave after the famine is over.

Genesis 45:7 "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant"

Have you ever been aware of someone preparing the way for you?

If everything we do and know is grounded on those who came before, think of all those who played a key role in your faith today.

We are not meant to keep the baton passed to us but pass it on. Who are you preparing the way for?

How are you part of God's plan of salvation? How are your actions laying the foundation for the next generation of the faith?

Commentary on Matthew 15:10-11, 15-28 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The lectionary made the inclusion of the lesson on uncleanness (10-20) optional. When placed in the context of the blessing of a Canaanite woman who by her gender and nationality was unclean, the issue of faith versus law begins to be revealed. The law deals with outward actions and outward standards of cleanliness but faith looks at the heart. If the heart is unclean, then everything that proceeds is unclean but if there is faith in the heart then the spirit of the law is fulfilled. This is one of the main points Jesus makes in Matthew through teachings and parables. To make this point, Jesus first goes to a region that is identified as a Gentile territory (11:22). The meeting of the Canaanite woman drives home the point. The word "Canaanite" is only used 13 places in the Bible and only once in the New Testament. Esau married Canaanite women which displeased Isaac (Genesis 28:1-8) and Judah married a Canaanite woman whose son was "evil in the sight of the LORD" (Genesis 38:2 and 1 Chronicles 2:3). This woman uses the messianic title "Son of David" which in Matthew is only used by the blind men in 9:27 and 20:30 and by the crowd during his Triumphal Entry (21:9,15). Being clearly unclean and outside of the "house of Israel", her use of this term is questionable which may explain Jesus first ignoring her. The conversation that followed raises more questions than it answers. Was Jesus answering the disciples when he said "lost sheep" and is she considered by Jesus a "lost sheep"? Is the "children's food" referencing the body of Jesus and are the crumbs an allusion to the grace given to Gentile believers? What is not in question is that it is the faith in her heart and not her legal cleanliness that saves her daughter.

Matthew 15:18 "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart"

Do our words and actions sometime betray the intention of our heart?

We call it a 'Freudian slip' but is it a glimpse into what is really in our hearts?
When have words spoken in anger or frustration revealed something that surprised even you?
Jesus doesn't want us simply to say his name and do good works but he wants our hearts to be in the right place. How is it with your heart today?
Have you given your heart totally and completely over to God? Why not?

Commentary on Romans 11:1–2a, 11-20, 23, 29–32 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The lectionary leaves out verses 11-20 and 23 which losses the thrust of Paul's argument. In chapter 10, he appears to condemn Israel for their rejection of Christ. This condemnation, however, was a growing problem in the Gentile church which needed to be addressed. Just as Paul in chapter 6 clarified the relationships between the law and grace and between sin and grace, Paul feels the need to clarify the relationship between Jews, Gentiles, and salvation. God has a distinct plan for those of Israel who refuse to accept Jesus. This plan includes provoking them to jealousy because of the grace God gives to the Gentiles who believe. This blessing of grace, however, is simply a means to an end and should not be taken for granted. The Gentiles are not better than the Jews but rather believers are blessed so that they can be a means of blessing for those who have yet to believe. The illustration of the grafted branches makes this point clear. God has not rejected "his people" but rather has included everyone else into the plan. That inclusion is based solely on faith and grace through Jesus Christ. In Christ, God uses those who are saved as a means of prevenient grace for those who have not yet come to believe.

Romans 11:29 "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

Do we have a tendency to view ourselves as the root rather than the branches?

After Paul's illustration of Gentiles as "wild olive branches" that are grafted on, do you find comfort in knowing that God's gifts and calling are irrevocable?

If those gifts and calling are for the benefit of not just your salvation but the salvation of the world, how have you been using those gifts and calling?

For those you know who are lost in a world of unbelief, do you find comfort knowing that God still has a plan for them?

Do we have a tendency to view ourselves as the root rather than the branches?

Sermon "A Matter of the Heart" ([Sermon Video](#))

During times of crisis like the current pandemic, we are forced to examine our priorities and what is essential. When challenged concerning hygiene laws, Jesus refocused the question on what is essential. Hygiene laws are necessary for your physical health but have nothing to do with your spiritual health. While the stomach was considered the seat of emotions in Jesus' day, the heart was the seat of the will and the soul. If the intent of our will is unclean then our actions will be unclean. To illustrate this point, Matthew follows this teach with the story of the Canaanite woman who according to Jewish law was unclean. During the encounter, however, her heart was revealed to be pure with love for her child and faith in God. It was her heart and not her race, religion, or gender that saved her child.

Getting our hearts right with God may appear simple but it is a daily struggle. Every day we must join with Jesus in saying "Not my will but yours oh God!". Only by God's daily grace do our hearts slowly return to what God originally intended them to be. Our hearts have been warped and distorted due to the pain and brokenness of the world we live in. Like Pharaoh, our hearts are often hardened after being wounded one too many times. Heart work is hard work for it means daily submitting by faith to God's healing grace. Submitting is not easy especially when we think we know better.

The Gentiles in the early church witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and began to view unbelieving Jews as rejected by God. How quick we are to judge others and how often we are wrong. Paul reminds them and us that God is in control and God has a plan. We can not judge because we do not nor can we know the totality of God's plan. We are called to simply have faith in God's plan and seek his will in our lives. Judging others only distorts our hearts and produces unclean thoughts and actions. The first step of heart work is to let God be God and humbly seek His will.

Joseph, through his trials of slavery and imprisonment, had learned to trust in God's will and God's plan. The multiple fulfillment of dreams had shown Joseph the unimaginable wisdom of God. Trusting in God's plan, however, does not automatically mean forgiveness. The hardest part of heart work is when God begins to work on old and hardened wounds. Unless these wounds are properly healed, the heart can never be fully receptive to all the joy and love God has planned. Even though they are hardened, they can still be a source of unclean desires like vengeance and envy. Joseph had a choice when he met his brothers and when his father died to dwell on that wound or to give it to God. His choice to submit to God's sanctifying grace restored not only his family but saved an entire people from the devastating effects of a long famine.

Heart work means letting go of our pride and our past wounds. Only through daily prayer, do we open our hearts to God's healing and transformative grace. As our hearts are healed and restored, we begin to experience the many gifts of the Holy Spirit and find an abundant life. Only when our hearts are in the right place can our minds truly focus on what is good in the world. A heart for God not only saves our soul but becomes a wellspring of grace in our families and community. Will you join with Jesus today and pray, "Not my will but your will be done - in my life, in my family, and in my world".