

Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 24, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 45:3-11,15 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Apart from the brief stories of Isaac and Noah, there are three main sagas in the Book of Genesis: Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. The reading this morning comes at the end of the eight chapter saga of Joseph. Quick recap of Joseph helps to set up this passage. Joseph was blessed by God with dreams and dream interpretation. Jacob loved Joseph and his brothers deeply resented him. This resentment led the brothers to sell Joseph into slavery where Joseph's ability to interpret dreams eventually made him an adviser to Pharaoh. God used Joseph's misfortune to provide a means by which Jacob and his family might be saved during a disastrous famine which Joseph predicted and planned for. After a little petty revenge by Joseph, Joseph forgives his brothers in this final scene of reconciliation. Through faith, Joseph is able to perceive God's redemption through the events of his life and heals his family. What was meant to be a short term safety net during the time of famine, however, will become a dependence upon Egypt as they forget God's promises which will set the stage for the Exodus story.

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Having addressed the fact of Christ's resurrection as the first fruit, Paul then addresses the question of what will happen to the rest of the harvest at the time of the resurrection. Continuing this theme of harvest and fruit, Paul describes our physical body as a seed. If some picked up an acorn or a mustard seed or even a grain of wheat and did not know where it came from, they would have no idea what it would look like when it was grown. Our physical bodies are the shell of the seed which must be shed in order for the life within to break forth. The shell is perishable but the life within is imperishable because it came from God. Just as the first Adam was made of dirt (the shell) and then was given the breath of God (life), so the image of dust (the shell) must go so that the image of the soul can be in heaven. This argument is both challenging and reassuring. It is challenging when, based on the physical resurrection of Jesus with the scars, many expressions of Christianity have customs regarding a physical burial, the direction the body must face, and the condition the body should be in after death. It is reassuring, however, to those who like the families of the victims of 9/11 have no body to bury.

Commentary on Luke 6:27-38 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

After Jesus proclaims, "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man", he tells the disciples to love their enemies. The message is clear - to truly follow Jesus is to make enemies of the world. Jesus, however, tells the disciples not to respond with hate but with love and compassion. Why should the disciples be loving and compassionate, because God the Father is loving and compassionate "for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." It is not simply, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" for "even sinners do the same". The "golden rule" is the minimum standard for a society. What Jesus is driving at is not simply morality but eternal judgment. This will provide the foundation for part of Jesus' prayer in 11:4 "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." We love and are compassionate not because we are inherently good but because God is loving and compassionate towards us. We will receive measure for measure the love and compassion we honestly show others.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

Two of the most challenging topics to preach on is the forgiveness and the love of an enemy. We rejoice in the knowledge of the Jesus has forgiven us but it becomes difficult when we are asked to forgive others. We talk about Paul's dramatic conversion and avoid how he was once the most dangerous enemy the church ever faced. The concepts of forgiveness and love of enemy are easy in the abstract or when we are the recipients of the forgiveness and love but they become harder when we are called to the one who loves and forgives. I became acutely aware of this difficulty after my first year of ministry on 9/11. All of society was calling for war and vengeance and yet the gospel message stayed the same. It would be easy to say that, since Jesus' words come after he talked about persecution because of the "Son of Man" and in light of his own experience of rejection at Nazareth, Jesus was actually referring to enemies of Jesus' message. Jesus, however, makes it clear that we are to forgive and love as we have been forgiven and loved by God.

This becomes especially difficult when the one who needs to be forgiven is a close friend or family member since these wounds are closest to the heart. That is exactly what Joseph did in the story from Genesis. Because of his father's affections and a gift from God, Joseph's brothers filled with jealousy nearly killed Joseph and sold him into slavery. Where the story picks up in the passage read today, Joseph is in a perfect position to exact revenge and yet he chooses love and forgiveness. Joseph saw past the physical need for justice and saw God's divine mercy. He says that even though it was done out of jealousy, God used the events to save all of Joseph's family.

Just as Joseph's family was saved, God's family is saved through Jesus Christ. Paul reminds the Corinthians that all of God's family will resurrected. The exact form of the resurrection is not as important as the promise of the resurrection. We often speak of this time of resurrection as the great feast or wedding banquet. The thing about family feasts, however, is that you have to actually sit down with the rest of the family. It is a time when old petty difference are put aside and feud are place on hold. The heavenly banquet, however, goes on for an eternity. The person you considered an enemy may end up seated across from you. We are faced with a choice. We learn to love and forgive each other now or face an eternity of uncomfortable silence.