

## *“Letting go and moving on”*

**August 17, 2008**

*Text: Genesis 45:1-15, Matthew 15:21-28*

### I.

The story of **Joseph** and his brothers, from the book of **Genesis**, is a remarkable story. It's a story of sibling rivalry and jealousy, on the one hand. But it's also a story of forgiveness, compassion and deep human feelings; human feelings, shaped by the inscrutable power of family ties and blood lines that run deep.

As you may recall, **Joseph** is the eleventh son of Jacob ... the first of his two sons with his beloved wife, Rachel, whom he totally adored and with whom he'd had difficulty having children.

So, from the outset, **Joseph** was the apple of Jacob's eye ... and he was a gifted and handsome son as well; all of which, increasingly, aroused jealousy in the spirit of his brothers.

In Joseph's teenage years, his father had a glorious robe made for him, with beautiful colors. And his older brothers' jealousy turned to hatred.

Later, Joseph had a dream and shared it with his brothers. In the dream, Joseph reigned over his brothers, rising above them in every way. At this, their spirit boiled over with hatred for their brother.

Some time later, Joseph was sent to check on his brothers who were pasturing their father's flock in a nearby region. Seeing Joseph alone, the brothers conspired to do him harm ... and they ended up selling him to a tribe from Gilead. Still later, Joseph was sold in Egypt to an official of Pharaoh.

But God's hand was somehow on Joseph; and eventually, after some false accusations that landed him in prison, Joseph's talent and abilities lifted him up ... to the point where he had greatly endeared himself to Pharaoh and, eventually, was named **Prime Minister** of all of Egypt. It's an amazing success story.

And now, more than a decade later, after a famine had struck the land of Canaan where Joseph's father Jacob and his brothers lived, the brothers, having no idea of what had become of Joseph, were sent by their father Jacob to Egypt to hopefully buy enough grain to be able to survive the hard times.

### II.

It was in this context, after all these years ... and on top of all that had transpired between Joseph and his brothers, that we come to our reading this morning, where Joseph is

reunited with his brothers.

Think of all the possible consequences ... the ways all of this could have played out. Joseph was in a position of incredible power.

Upon seeing his brothers—who had sold him into slavery some fifteen years ago, who had certainly wanted to see him reduced in some way, if not dead—he could have done anything to them he wanted. He could have brought them unimaginable suffering.

But God had been working in **Joseph's** spirit over the years. And Joseph did not choose to see his life-situation in terms of revenge and pay back. Rather, Joseph chose to see his situation in terms of the *life-giving* purposes of God.

So often in life, **we choose** our attitude and disposition. We choose how to respond to adversity. We choose whether or not to forgive and *let go* of things and move on. We choose to be a big person or a small person.

Again, God was working in Joseph's life to the point where Joseph was able to see the larger purposes of God in things. The biblical account doesn't tell us HOW Joseph got to that point. Somehow, through the work of the Spirit, he simply evolved. No apparent trace of anger or revenge or distrust in his spirit.

*Amazing!*

And upon being reunited with his brothers, all Joseph has for them are feelings of compassion, affection and well-being. All he wants is to know about his father and his younger brother, Benjamin (they had the same mother) ... and *to do what he can* to make sure his father and brothers are alright.

### III.

There are times in our lives, friends, when we have to forget and forgive, *let go* of the past and move on. There are times when, if we can't put our past behind us, our future is forever paralyzed and held back.

Always in our lives, God calls us to LIFE—today. We cannot allow ourselves, therefore, to be forever hung up on the imperfections and shortcomings of yesterday. Along the way, many of us SAY things or DO things that we wish, looking back, we could undo.

Still—always—there's a time to **let go and move on.**

1. It's one thing to learn from our past and to remember enough to not repeat former mistakes in judgment. Surely, this is a no-brainer; something we all want to do.

2. But it's another thing to be forever hung-up on our past to the point where we're incapacitated and can't move on.

There's a time **to let go** and to embrace our future with hope and possibility. In the story of Joseph and his brothers, it's amazing how Joseph is able to do precisely that.

CHECK IT OUT, friends! Haven't most of us here this morning had experiences in our lives—things we've said or done that we wish hadn't happened? Perhaps we've made poor choices ... or experienced a lapse in judgment—in a relationship ... in a career path ... with our finances ... or with some moral dilemma or challenge.

Hey, it's the human situation. We're not perfect ... we're human ... we make mistakes; sometimes we fail. But—GET THIS: our failures don't have to be endings. And certainly, our mistakes don't have to hold us back from the possibilities the future holds: to make good choices (today) ... and do good things (today) ... and realize God's purposes, again and again (today).

#### IV.

One of the keys in all of this, friends ... one of the keys to **letting go and moving on** is to take the *high road* ... the road to the spiritual high ground. That's clearly what **Joseph** did.

Think of how he *could have* responded to his brothers?? To respond as he did—with forgiveness and a magnanimous spirit—he had to suck up some degree of anger and revenge that, understandably, could have held powerful sway in his spirit.

Joseph saw the BIG PICTURE of his life that we talk about all the time. He saw the inter-relationship of things on a big scale. How things fit together; how they inter-relate.

Perhaps he saw his life in the present from the vantage point of the future, from the vantage point of the end of his life back into the present. With all of this in mind, he understood how *love* is more powerful than hatred, *compassion* more powerful than anger, and *forgiveness* more powerful than revenge.

These *dark* expressions of the spirit ... they don't get us anywhere. There's no room for them on the *high ground*. And the *high ground*, friends, is where it's at in this life. It *is* the life to which God calls us in Christ.

And with the *high ground* beckoning—always—we have to be able to **let go and move on**. We have to be able to put things behind us. Perhaps we can't forget them completely, and that's okay; but, certainly, we CAN forget them enough.

## V.

Friends—GET THIS—God is working, all the time, in the lives of each one of us. God is working in your life, in my life ... nudging us toward the *high ground* ... moving us, however slowly, towards a bigger world ... to a more inclusive love.

I believe that! That's what God does.

God's vision of creation is BIG ... and it's all about moving us towards ONENESS. Indeed, the *theme* verse in all the Bible for God's intentions, for God's purposes is **John 17:21,**

*That they may all be ONE ...*

For that to happen in our families, in our communities, in our states and nations around the world, we have to all be willing to grow ... and to become a bigger person and a bigger nation.

To be sure, that's what happened with Jesus in our reading from **Matthew** this morning where Jesus' own world ... his own sense of his ministry ... the inherited *boundaries* of his traditions were challenged by an *outsider* ... not only was she a Gentile, but a Canaanite as well, historical enemies of Israel.

However, if we allow this encounter speak to us, God was at work in the tenacity of the woman's faith. CHECK IT OUT! She was relentless: ***My daughter is tormented by a demon!***

And she wouldn't let up ... to the point where the toughness of her faith served to break down barriers and alter boundaries; to the point where the fact that she was an outsider, a Gentile, a Canaanite ... no longer mattered.

What mattered is that she was a human being ... a child of God.

***Have mercy on me, Lord!***

***Lord, help me ...***

***Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.***

In all this, Jesus heard her words, he felt her faith, and love won the day.

## VI.

There are times, friends, when we've got to **let go** of the old and invite in the new. There are times when we have to **move beyond** the smaller world and welcome in the larger world.

Friends, this is what it is: God wants us to **let go** of any practice or tendency that makes us a smaller person.

When we're too hung up on yesterday, we're a smaller person. When we're too hung up on boundaries ... on elitism and making distinctions that diminish people, we're a smaller person.

And God's purposes are NOT about smallness. They're not about smallness ... pettiness ... exclusion ... simplistic reductions into good and evil. These are NOT God's ways.

To **let go and move on** in our lives, we need a BIG spirit; a spirit that can, like Joseph, rise above the bad things that happen to us. The things which, if we let them, can bring us down and sap the life and hope right out of us.

Yesterday—with its worn-out failures and defeats, with its worn-out boundaries and restrictions—is powerless to change our lives. The choices we make today and beyond are what our lives are about.

The choice to forget ... and forgive ... the choice to **let go and move on**; because that's where the LIFE is. That's where the HOPE is.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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