St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

[Genesis](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Epiphany/CEpi6_RCL.html#ot1) 45:3-11, 15

[Psalm 37:1-2,](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Epiphany/CEpi6_RCL.html#ps1) 41-42

[1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Epiphany/CEpi6_RCL.html#nt1)

[Luke 6:27-38](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Epiphany/CEpi6_RCL.html#gsp1)

Enemies No More

If Joseph had known that his eleven brothers had no sense of humor when it came to listening to his dream interpretations, he might have thought twice about sharing. As it was, they were enraged to think that this young upstart, brother or not, would dare to imagine he would be lording it over all of them. The next thing Joseph knew was that, not only did they consider killing him outright and lying to his father, Jacob, about the cause of death, but stopped short of that thanks to one brother who didn’t want murder on his conscience. So, they ended up throwing him in a pit, leaving him, then selling him into slavery to a bunch of Ishmaelites who dragged him off to Egypt. With brothers like that, who needs enemies? Oh wait, they were jealous, envious, resentful and wanted him dead. Yes. They were enemies!

As it turned out in the end, Joseph was right on the money with his dream interpretations, and he became pretty famous for the gift, not to mention rather high up in society due to his many other gifts for administration and management. Thus, after a few decidedly difficult and politically charged ups and downs, he rose to the number 2 spot in Egypt which is where we find him today.

The famine has driven his long-lost brothers into Egypt in search of grain for food and they find themselves in front of the Regent, second only to Pharoah. Of course, they don’t immediately recognize Joseph. He is no long a youngster, but a grown man who has accumulated a fair amount of life experience, not to mention now being in charge of food storage and food distribution for the entire nation and its close allies. But Joseph recognizes his brothers, alright, and decides to accuse them of spying and have them prove their innocence and sincerity by going home to fetch Joseph’s youngest brother, Benjamin..

So now here they all are and the time for the denouement has arrived, and with the help of an interpreter, Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” The scriptures say the brothers were so dismayed after this revelation they couldn’t say a thing. I would say that’s a bit generous on the part of the Genesis writer. How about “they were agonizingly humiliated and scared out of their wits, especially when Joseph invited them to ‘come closer.’” But Joseph loved the ones who were once his enemies and rather than even pretend revenge, he instantly desired to have them put their fears to rest, to find ways to ease their collective consciousness, and to realize and learn what the power of love can really do.

“Do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” In other words, it was God who got me here and you were and are a part of all that. So now we will all survive. Joseph did not say thank you for the favor of your decision to get rid of me. What he did was absolve them absolutely and completely from any need for remorse or shame. What happened, happened, long ago…. is all now in the past. Until this moment, who would have guessed, whether Joseph, his brothers, or even his father, could have known that all the twists and turns of life would bring them to this moment of recognition and enlightenment which would be nothing less than a blessing for every one of them and all those directly or indirectly concerned with them. How could they have ever imagined that a family, broken apart by jealousy, guilt, secrecy and envy would find it’s way back to loving wholeness and healing.

It is an immense story that has echoed down through the ages with enormous lessons for all generations and for us in our own living today. As such, we are led to ask ourselves what part of parts of this story are ours. What of our own relationships with family and friends, acquaintances, workplace associates, institutional cohorts and the like? What of our dreams and favors have we shared with others, only to inspire jealousy, resentment and yes, enmity?

What do any of us know of being sold down the river or perhaps being part of a group that betrayed knowingly or unknowingly someone who trusted you? Have you ever been angry enough with someone that you would do everything you could to be rid of him or her? What is it deep within you that betrays everything you wish to be? Could it be there is a little bit of Joseph and a little bit of the brothers residing in each of us? Perhaps the time has come, as it did for Joseph and his brothers, for a little sorting out to take place.

These are tough questions and, perhaps, come at a good time, as we approach the end of Epiphany and enter into the murky time of Lent. Walking toward the cross demands profound and honest truth and perhaps Epiphany has shed some light into a few of the dark places hiding in our hearts. Lent presents a time to turn things around, from dark to light, from wrong to right, from estrangement to reconciliation. Anything less, makes the walk toward Good Friday meaningless.

Reconciliation is defined in the dictionary as the processes of two people or groups in a conflict agreeing to make amends or come to a truce. That’s tidy, but from a biblical viewpoint, the Greek word translated as “reconciliation” in fact means to change completely. To change completely has very little to do with simply coming to a truce, and when you think about it, we can be pretty sure that would not be enough for Jesus. After all, through his death on the cross, God made reconciliation possible for all God’s people. In other words, God isn’t merely concerned with people reconciling with people, but rather, that through reconciliation with each other, we become reconciled to *God.* Without reconciliation with each other, we are alienated from God,[[1]](#footnote-1) which is not where any faithful heart wishes to be.

The question is, what is it in our lives that seeks to be reconciled and where to start? What was it within Joseph that allowed him to take pleasure in seeing his brothers again, to kiss them, gathering them to him with so much love that he wept? What did or did not need to take place in order for him to choose his course of reconciliation? What does or does not need to take place in order for each of use to choose a course of reconciliation in our own lives?

Perhaps, first we need to allow ourselves to shed a few tears, for ourselves, for time and opportunities lost, and in grief for that which can never return to the place before a relationship was broken. If the tears will not come, then we must ask ourselves why not. What’s stopping them and why? I can always remember my mother saying when I came to her with a troubling situation, you’ll feel better if you just go and have a good cry, and then get on with patching things up.

So, we weep for what was broken and then look at what must be done for the coming together in reconciled relationship again. What must be done by each one of us in our own relationships, and what must the collective “we” do in our communities and the world to effect reconciliation.

To begin, we must never consider that reconciliation is impossible. The fact is, reconciliation is possible no matter the severity of situation and circumstance. Joseph’s brothers behaved in the most heinous way toward him, and after playing with them for a little while, he sought to reconcile with them completely, letting all that had happened in the past, slip away into a forgotten past.

Reconciliation leaves no room for the ands and buts, as in, I am ready to reconcile but don’t ever do that to me again! We leave the past behind, as we enter into a newly minted relationship. To bring the past into the conversation, is to sully it, stain it with memories of who did what to whom, and how one suffered as a result. In short, the past brings with it fresh blame and therefore fresh suffering and resentment. It is the relationship that is the center star here, and not the past.

Reconciliation cannot be realized with lies or even slight fabrications in order to save face or to seem less at fault than we are. It demands the whole truth and nothing but the truth, good, bad or really bad. When Joseph met his brothers for the second time, he disclosed who he was and reiterated what he knew had happened in the past, but he did not bring it with him and he did not magnify how he had been affected by his brothers’ actions against him. He quickly laid the truth of the matter out in front of them all, after calling them to come closer to him. He seemed to want to talk to them quietly rather than out loud so that all could hear of the brothers’ evil intent. He told the truth of the past but moved quickly to the truth of the present situation which was what brought the brothers into Egypt. Joseph understood, first hand, the effects of the famine on his land and on the lives of his father, his brothers and the rest of his family.

Joseph does what he can to move forward into right action. He tells his brothers to go and bring his father and all his family and livestock back to Egypt so that they would not suffer due to the famine. He, Joseph would take care of them. For their part, the brothers admitted to the truth of their mistreatment of Joseph and acted to bring Joseph’s father and his entire family to Egypt and a secure and safe life.

Reconciliation requires, grieving with regret for what has transpired. It requires leaving the past behind and it require action going forward. Yet, perhaps, most importantly, it requires the recognition of God’s presence in the midst of it all. It requires that we understand and accept that all the circumstances that have surrounded us, leading us into misdirected and broken relationships, have found a time, place and time for reconciliation to take place, and that God is at the center of it.

It requires an outward pouring of love, filled with good intent, prayer, endurance, a giving of oneself, in the same way that Jesus understood love. Nothing more than a pure gift of God, with no conditions attached and with no expectation of anything in return. Joseph recognized God’s hand in all the challenges and triumphs of his own life and that all he had experienced had brought him to this moment of reconciliation. He found within himself a limitless well of blessings which he spread lavishly over his entire family, over Egypt and beyond.

We are not Joseph, or his brothers or their father, nor are we living with their story. We have our own families, our own stories, our own circumstances. Yet, from the beginning of time until today, there has been and always will be a profound need for reconciliation. In a world always wracked with pain and suffering, with division and misunderstanding, and riddled with mistakes and terrible decisions, may we, who call ourselves Christian, as a community of the One who is always present to offer unlimited divine love, attempt to offer some of that divinely given love, too? It is that love which is poured into us, inspired by the Holy Spirit…a divine spirit of love… that allows us to participate in the creation of a community we call the Kingdom of God; a community of love among those who were once called enemies.

May we always be prepared to do whatever it is we can do and to work ceaselessly for reconciliation between ourselves, between communities and nations, and all those **we** once called enemies, until they are enemies no more and reconciliation becomes no longer a dream, but a reality that will set all God’s people free at last to love and to live in peace.

Amen

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

February 20, 2022

1. See Colossians 1:20–22 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)