

## **Reconciling Christ**

Genesis 45:1-15

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Before we feast on the scripture before us this morning,  
let me set the table for you.  
After his brothers sold him into slavery  
Joseph – in an incredible turn of events –  
winds up in Egypt and becomes Pharaoh’s right hand man,  
the second in command, the overseer of the land.  
Now, there’s a famine back in Canaan,  
and Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt looking for grain.  
They plead their case before the powerful Joseph,  
bowing before him, but they didn’t recognize him.  
Joseph kind of likes that -- what an excellent development, he thinks --  
he likes the power that he has over his brothers.  
In fact, he makes them fear for their lives.  
He accuses them of being spies,  
and then he sets up his younger brother, Benjamin, to make him look like a thief.  
His brothers tear their clothes in anguish and beg Joseph to release Benjamin.  
Yadda, yadda, yadda,  
and now I’m reading from Genesis, chapter 45, verses 1-15:

*Since Joseph could no longer control his feelings in front of his servants,  
he sent them out of the room.*

*When he was alone with his brothers, he told them,  
“I am Joseph.”*

*Then he cried so loudly that the Egyptians heard him  
and told about it in the king’s palace.*

*Joseph asked his brothers if his father was still alive,  
but they were too frightened to answer.*

*Joseph told them to come closer to him, and when they did, he said:*

*“Yes, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.*

*Don’t worry or blame yourselves for what you did.*

*God is the one who sent me ahead of you to save lives.*

*There has already been a famine for two years,*

*and for five more years no one will plow fields or harvest grain.*

*But God sent me on ahead of you to keep your families alive*

*and to save you in this wonderful way.*

*After all, you weren’t really the ones who sent me here—it was God.*

*He made me the highest official in the king’s court*

*and placed me over all Egypt.*

*Now hurry back and tell my father that his son Joseph says,*

*‘God has made me ruler of Egypt.*

*Come here as quickly as you can.*

*You will live near me in the region of Goshen  
with your children and grandchildren,  
as well as with your sheep, goats, cattle,  
and everything else you own.  
I will take care of you there during the next five years of famine.  
But if you don't come, you and your family  
and your animals will starve to death.'*

*All of you, including my brother Benjamin,  
can tell by what I have said that I really am Joseph.  
Tell my father about my great power here in Egypt  
and about everything you have seen.  
Hurry and bring him here."*

*Joseph and Benjamin hugged each other and started crying.  
Joseph was still crying as he kissed each of his other brothers.  
After this, they started talking with Joseph. (Genesis 45:1-15, CEV)*

It's a beautiful scene, right?  
With great feeling and emotion,  
these long-lost brothers abandon social distancing,  
and hug, kiss, and weep with each other.  
We like stories that end like that.  
This is reconciliation, we think.

But before we think about reconciliation in terms of a great ending,  
before we think about it as something we must achieve,  
in the sense that there's a problem with us if we aren't ready for reconciliation,  
we have to confront the brokenness in Joseph's story and our stories.  
We have to confront how the use and abuse of power can be an impediment  
to reconciliation, to right relationships.  
Because God doesn't just appear at the end of the story.  
God's invisible hand is in the midst of it.

And let me tell you,  
God couldn't have picked a more dysfunctional family to work through.  
I want to invite you to a thought exercise.  
I want you to imagine what it would look like if Judah, the oldest of Joseph's brothers,  
consulted with a therapist because he senses he's got some unresolved issues  
that limits his ability to form healthy relationships.

He goes into the office sits down,  
and, after exchanging pleasantries and saying a little about himself,  
the therapist says, "Tell me about your family".

"Well," Judah says,  
my father and my uncle were twins,  
but they didn't get along.  
In fact, for a long time, my father thought he was going to get killed by my uncle.

That's because he stole from my uncle the right to my grandpa's inheritance. Of course, my grandma tricked my grandpa into giving it to him."

"Well, then my dad married my mom by mistake – he actually thought he was marrying my aunt but *his* uncle tricked him by pulling the ol' bait and switch, substituting my mom for my aunt at the altar.

Now, just so you don't get confused, my dad did end up marrying my aunt after he married my mother, so my aunt is also my step-mom, and my cousins are also my half-brothers. My aunt didn't like my mom because she wanted to have children like my mom did. That's the reason why my aunt, who is my stepmother, had my dad sleep with her maid and then why my mom had my dad sleep with her maid.

All and all, I have four brothers and one sister born from my mother. I have seven half-brothers, born of three mothers, one of whom is also my aunt, who is also my stepmother.

Now, just so you know, it's never been a secret, that dad always loved my aunt more than my mom, and so it's no surprise that he treated my cousins, who are also my half-brothers, better than he treated us. And *that's* the reason why we dumped my smug cousin half-brother Joseph into a pit and sold him and his dreamcoat to those Ishmaelites.

We didn't want my dad to worry  
so we told him that Joseph had died.  
We couldn't have known how much he'd grieve.  
I should also mention that I have a daughter with my daughter-in-law,  
so my child is also my grandchild.  
But that's not my fault - I thought I was sleeping with a prostitute.  
Other than that, my family is pretty normal.  
So, tell me, why do I feel so insecure and anxious?  
Why can't I allow people to get close to me?

Corruption, injustice, grief, guilt, jealousy, shame, sin, hatred.  
The story of Israel's first family had it all.  
This is the family through which God will bless the whole world.  
Kind of brings hope to the strained relationships in our families, doesn't it?

This family had it all, including God's invisible hand steering these terrible choices and dysfunctional relationships and tragic events toward something more, toward life and not death.

After Joseph was thrown into the pit by his brothers,  
he was sold as a slave and winds up in Egypt.

Then he was wrongly accused and was thrown into prison for several years.  
Yet, after interpreting dreams for the Pharaoh,  
he rose to the second in command of all Egypt.

For a while, it's unclear what he will do when his brothers come to him for food.  
In our verses this morning, Joseph extends forgiveness and mercy to his brothers,  
telling them it was God who brought him to Egypt and allowed him to rise to power.

God is barely mentioned in these chapters,  
but God has been there all along, Joseph says.  
God is on the side of life and works through the story to bring good.

Famine, grief, guilt, addictions, shame, sin, hatred.  
Of course, we know that these are not just limited to Joseph's family.  
They are a part of our stories, too.

Most of us do not know what it's like to live in a famine.  
But I'm willing to guess that some of us know  
what despair and hopelessness feels like.  
Maybe right now.

Most of us don't know the throbbing grief of losing a child, but some of us do.  
And we do know what it means to mourn, to grieve.  
Maybe right now.

Most of us have not experienced a hatred rising to a desire to murder,  
but we do know what it means  
to want vengeance on someone who has hurt us.

Most of us, I'm willing to bet,  
have not thrown our brother in a pit and sold him into slavery,  
but we do know that our sins have consequences both for ourselves and others.

Most of us don't know what it's like to be set up for a crime we didn't commit,  
but many in our country and world know what that's like.  
And we do know what injustice looks like.

In the midst of the brokenness that we know, I encourage you to keep your eyes open to God's  
hand in the midst of it.

God's purpose and God's mission in this world  
is to make whole all that has been broken,  
to bring together all that has been separated,  
to make right all that has gone wrong,  
to heal and to reconcile all people with each other and with God.

This is the ministry of reconciliation.  
This is God's purpose, God's mission, and what God is doing in Christ.  
If we are in Christ, this is our purpose, this is our mission.

But yet it's complex.

Reconciliation is not something that we will, we achieve.  
Because it's not something that we can do alone.  
It is God who reconciles.  
It is God who acts.  
We just do what we can to lay the groundwork for it to happen.  
It takes time.  
That's because we have to learn the truth about ourselves,  
and the one who has done something to violate right relationships  
has to learn the truth of their offense.

We can't will reconciliation, but we can participate it.  
We can't make it, but we can be open to it.  
We can't do it, but, by the power at work with us,  
God can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. Amen.