

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“What Goes Around, Comes Around”

Based on Genesis
45:15

The story of Joseph is better than a mid-afternoon soap opera. It has intrigue, jealousy, violence, and victory. The story begins a generation before we meet the man in question, a tale of two women, sisters: one the prize, and one the consolation. Rachel was beautiful, but struggled to bear sons; Leah lived in her shadow, but filled the tent with what in ancient times was the greatest gift a wife could give her husband: many sons!

A generation later, and the scene was set for a family drama like no other. Leah's sons grew strong and sturdy, while the two sons of the beloved Rachel, younger and fair-haired, remained in the tents, pampered and cooed. But more important, Joseph had his father's ear, his father's time, and gleaned much from his father's wisdom: of the land, of the ebb and flow of the seasons, of YHWH and the ancient scriptures. As Joseph became older, the jealousy reached a boiling point, and when opportunity arrived, and the

boys were far from home, Joseph was sold as a slave and sent to far away Egypt, while his brothers returned home with a blood stained cloak, and presented it to a grieving father.

“So then, it was
not you who sent
me here, but God.

~Genesis 45:8

The fair-haired boy's life took a dramatic turn. From playboy to slave, from being served, to dragging out slop pails to the pigs, from wealth to wanting. One imagines, though, moments in this most difficult life, when snippets of his father's wisdom: about the land, or about life, slipped out: to other slaves, to a manager, and eventually to the king's ear. The Pharaoh recognized wisdom, and took advantage of it.

In time, Joseph became known as a good man, a wise man, and a capable leader. He rose in power in the royal palace, offered advice to the Pharaoh, and was placed in charge of many things. (Imagine the

jealousy in the palace. A foreigner in charge!) When a great famine spread across the land, it was because of Joseph's insights, that Egypt had much grain to spare, stored in readiness. It was this grain that Joseph's older brothers, along with hundreds or thousands of others, came in search of.

And now the scene we have all been waiting for. The moment in the drama where the organ music rises to a crescendo and the television screen fades to black for a commercial. Joseph's brothers finally made their way to the head of the line in the courtyard and with bowed heads presented themselves to the Pharaoh's representative. Joseph lifted his head from his paperwork and found himself staring into the eyes of his brothers. He recognized them, and was overcome with emotion. They did not recognize the deeply tanned, royally dressed man before them, and shook in fear. Dead silence in the courtyard.

Here it is friends. This is the moment. This is where you and I and television viewers all across the country lean forward in our seats. “Well,

well, well," you can imagine Joseph saying, "Who do we have here? You want grain you say? Ha! Fat chance of that? What goes around, comes around, they say!

- Do you know who I am?
- Do you remember what you did to me?
- Do you remember what you did to my father?
- Do you see what I have become here?
- Do you realize the power I have right now?
- Do you understand how much trouble you are in?"

But that's not what Joseph did.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. (v4.5)

I feel let down, in an odd sort of way. I feel disappointed that the sweet revenge I was waiting for has soured in my mouth. Because Joseph did not do any of the things I thought he would do. And if I think a little more deeply about it, I'm not sure that I could have responded the way

Joseph did. I'm not sure after all Joseph went through, that I, in a similar situation, could have reached out my hand and said, "Brothers! I am so glad to see you. How are things at home? Let me help you all. I have land. I have food. Come, let's be together again!"

The word we are looking for is 'reconciliation.' By definition, it means, "the restoration of friendly relations." But in real life terms, at least with Godly whispers in the mix, it means more than just having a family reunion. It means things like,

- Not taking advantage of those who are struggling
- Letting past hurts and anger slip away to the past where they belong
- Seeing the moment to get the upper hand but choosing to let it slip on by
- Offering a hand of welcome when you feel like turning it into a fist
- Looking at the other side of the fence, and realizing there is another side to the story

I can assure you, holy reconciliation is not an easy thing to do. But it is a most important thing to try to do. Because Christian discipleship is not just about "Following Him"(Mat 4:19), learning

about Him, doing things for Him. Christian discipleship moves also, to issues of character, and values. These things do not require you to 'do more work' but they require you to do much 'soul searching.' Because it is just so much easier to 'get mad' and to 'get even.'

I can't help but think that along Joseph's journey, he was angry, bitter, hurt deeply to the core, felt betrayed and abandoned. But somewhere along the way, the whispers of his father emerged: whispers of...

- a God who was steadfast,
- a God with an eternal plan in place,
- a God who protects those who are faithful,
- a God who understands all.

And somewhere along the way, Joseph chose to hold on to those ideas, rather than the anger and the betrayal. Because of this choice, God blessed him, again and again: not in expected ways, but as a key figure for a foreign king, and reconciliation with his family. Joseph chose to remain steadfast. He chose to reach out his hand and say to those who had hurt him, "Welcome home!"

Can you? Because... "What goes around, comes around."