

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Revenge is a Cold Dish"

Based on Genesis 45:1-15

When my oldest daughter was a toddler and would get sick, we would bundle up on the couch with the Children's Tylenol nearby, her favourite blankie, and of course, a well worn VHS copy of Cinderella. We would watch it over and over again, until she felt better. And in case you've forgotten, the prince finds the princess with the glass slipper, and they live happily ever after.

No matter how old we are, there is something we love about the happy ending.

- We long for it.
- We hope for it.
- We think we deserve it.
- And we believe it should be the outcome to all of life's difficulties.

Somehow, we've got it into our heads that every ending should be neat and tidy and pretty and fair. Unless, you happen to be the step-sisters or the step-mother, or the murdered father in Cinderella's story. Something tells me they weren't happy with the ending at all!

I don't know about you, but I am growing weary of the never-ending drama of Jacob and his family, where glimpses

of glory are quickly squashed by game show phrases like, "The Price is Right," or "Let's Make a Deal." I am longing for a happy ending to this complicated story, singing quietly to myself: "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know." But it hasn't happened so far. And brace yourself, because it's not going to happen today either. Today, a glimpse of reconciliation is clouded by the cold hand of revenge.

For you more avid readers out there, it's more about what is left out of the story than what we do hear of Joseph that shapes my opinion. So let's catch up. When we left Joseph last week, he was headed down the road towards Egypt, sold by his brothers to a travelling caravan for a pretty penny, split among themselves. They returned home with a well-rehearsed story for Daddy of Joseph's untimely death, covering their guilt with the nervous jingle of coins in their pockets.

Jacob was overcome with grief, for despite everything, he and Joseph had had a special bond. And the brothers realized, they had broken something sacred within their father by their actions. But that was only the beginning of their troubles. For drought was on the way. Cash was tight. The animals were

many. Some difficult decisions were going to need to be made.

Meanwhile on the Egyptian front, Joseph was finding friends in low and high places. Over the next few years Joseph was as a slave, a novelty of the Pharaoh's wife (if you get my drift), a prisoner, a dream keeper, and eventually, advisor to the Pharaoh himself, placed in charge of the Egyptian Food Bank, shall we say, as the famine spread throughout the land. Oddly enough, he did very well where ever he landed, and made good friends, at each of these perilous points in his story.

Now here's where we need to start paying attention. In today's reading, we encountered Joseph as he revealed himself to his brothers, invited them to his country estate on the Nile to live in luxury and safety, and to bring his family back together again. Lovely, right? The happy ending we've been looking for.

But here's why I don't quite buy it. Genesis 45 is the THIRD trip his brothers made to Egypt for food. Joseph had known from the very first who they were, although his brothers did not recognize him. Joseph had toyed with them on the first and second trips for food, like a cat with a mouse, without

revealing who he was. He had had them thrown into prison. He had made them look like thieves. He had used his power as the keeper of the food supply, to make his brothers grovel at his feet for mercy. Why?

Only, when the brothers revealed that they had an elderly father at home was Joseph stopped in his tracks.

"Jacob, alive?"

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!" (Gen. 45:4)

What first appeared as a story of **reconciliation** has been uncovered to be more a story of **revenge**. And yet, in a strange turn of events, the revenge became a **revelation** of an elderly father not seen in years, or expected to be still alive.

And for a moment we see Joseph at his very best: recognizing the whisper of YHWH that had threaded through the extraordinary events of the last few years, to bring him to a point where all the power and privilege he had achieved in the palace, meant little, when there might be an opportunity to return to his father's arms once again. He said to his brothers:

"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen. 45:8)

It is said that, *"When you begin a journey of revenge start by digging two graves: one for your*

enemy and one for you."

Joseph's brothers had satisfied their revenge years earlier when they plotted their brother's demise. They became burdened, though, with the knowledge of just how much they had injured their father in the process. Joseph had dabbled with cold hearted revenge, and almost missed the opportunity to be reunited with his father.

- They all got tripped up by revenge.
- They all suffered because of their arrogance.
- They all had an opportunity to stop, and take a new direction.

And for just a few moments in this family story, they did. Joseph used his power and privilege to get his family to safety and provided for them until the time of famine was over. The brothers humbled themselves to accept the offer of good will. An elderly father was able to spend his final days in comfort and some of the ache in his heart was lifted. It was enough, for the moment.

And perhaps, it is enough for us.

Perhaps we are not supposed to strive for Cinderella endings, because there really aren't Cinderella endings.

Maybe we're not supposed to have the Cinderella ending, because we might stop listening to God.

There are endings and beginnings.

There are moments of letting go, and stepping up, and starting out.

There are losses and there are successes.

There are shining moments of glory, and dark nights of despair.

And through it all we win sometimes,

we comprise,

we turn away from,

we lose,

we fix,

we make mistakes,

we have to leave some things unfinished,

we break some things,

we do what we can,

and we try to find a way to accept what we cannot do or fix or change.

And friends, we are never finished. Life is never done, all wrapped up neat and tidy and pretty and fair. But we do the best we can, in the moment we find ourselves in.

And perhaps that is the lesson to be learned from Joseph.

Revenge destroys you as much as it destroys the other.

Life is not perfect.

I am not perfect.

But it will have to do, for now.

And when you don't know what to do...

There is God.

Amen.