

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany, February 24, 2019,

Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38

This Sunday's lessons are rich. Our lesson from Genesis is part of the story of Joseph, when he reveals to his brothers who sold him into slavery who he has become. Our gospel lesson is part of Jesus' sermon on the plain to those who chose to follow him. And our epistle is from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church about the nature of resurrection life.

At first glance our gospel lesson makes little sense. Who would want to love an enemy? Most of us don't think of others as our enemies. We may think of other nations being enemies of our nation, but I don't believe most of us think of others as our enemies. So I want you to think about the people in your lives who betray, hurt or ignore you as your "enemies." What we do with people who betray, hurt or ignore us is to keep them at bay and strive to protect ourselves from further harm. Or we might wonder why they ignore and hurt us. This is only human nature, to view the events in our lives from our solitary point of view. We often fail to see the events of our lives from other people's point of view, or God's point of view.

Our lesson from Genesis for today is part of the story of Joseph. It is my favorite story in the entire bible, partly because it is a story of redemption and reconciliation between brothers and the ups and downs of their lives. To understand the meaning of today's part of the story we must recall how the story began. Joseph was the first born of his father's favorite wife, Rachel. He had one brother and ten step brothers from three other mothers. As a sign of his favored status, his father Jacob gave him a multi-colored coat. Being young he was often insensitive to his step-brothers, and he told them of his dreams as how they and his father would bow down to him. This only made his brothers angrier, so one day when Jacob sent Joseph to check on his step-brothers who were caring for the herds, he wore his multi-colored coat. His step-brothers saw him wearing his special coat from a distance, and to make a long story short, collectively decided to sell him to slave traders, as they killed an animal and smeared its blood on Joseph's coat so they could tell their father that he had been killed by a wild animal. Talk about betrayal!

When he arrived in Egypt he was sold to the captain of Pharaoh's guard, and served as a house-servant. Things could have been much worse. And soon it became worse as the wife of his master lusted after him, but he refused her advances. So she feigned that Joseph was trying to rape her when in fact she was chasing him and took his robe. His master then threw him into jail. But Joseph still trusted in God.

Finally, while in jail Joseph interpreted the dreams of two of Pharaoh's servants. For one it was good news and for the other, bad news. The cupbearer would be restored to his position. But upon being restored to Pharaoh's court, he forgot all about Joseph. Then Pharaoh had troubling dreams of cows and corn, seven fat and plump ones followed by seven lean ones. After hearing Pharaoh's complaints about his dreams, the cupbearer remembered how Joseph could interpret dreams. So Pharaoh sent for him, and when Joseph gave him the interpretation of seven good years followed by seven years of drought, and how Pharaoh should save during the years of plenty for the years of drought, Joseph was elevated to Pharaoh's second in command.

When the drought came, Joseph's family heard that there was food in Egypt and were sent by their father to bring back grain for them to survive. Then in today's story, Joseph had the opportunity to have revenge for the evil that his brothers did to him so long ago. But instead of exacting revenge he sought to reconcile himself to his brothers despite the evil that they had done, because he saw in the arc

of the story of his life how God had used him with all the betrayal, suffering and forgetfulness to save the family and many others. He was able to love his step-brothers who long ago saw him as their “enemy.”

Most of us never rise to the prominence of Joseph and seemingly have his good fortune. But all of us who claim to be Christian must have received forgiveness, grace and mercy at some point. The key I believe to being able to love our “enemy” is to realize that we at some time or the other have betrayed, hurt or forgotten someone we should have loved. And somehow we have been blessed to be forgiven and reconciled not because we did anything to deserve it, but because someone has shown us grace. This is how Joseph’s step-brothers must have felt when Joseph cried and revealed that he held nothing against them.

How many of you have seen the movie, “To Sir, with love”? I recently saw it again on KQED. It is the story of a black engineer from the Bahamas who wound up taking a teaching job in a tough school in England. The character is played by Sidney Poitier, who has a lot of class. Although he grew up poor, he was able to rise above his beginnings and become a well-educated gentleman. He treated all the people with respect, even his unruly students. He gave them an insight of who they could become, so they always referred to him as “Sir.”

There was one student on the verge of becoming a young woman who became infatuated with him, even though he was black. One day her mother came to meet “Sir” and asked him to help her. Her daughter was staying out late at night until 11 pm, and she was worried about her. “Sir” replied that it was not his role to handle this family matter. But the mother insisted that her daughter always quotes him and would surely listen to him. She no longer listens to her, so she thought she would ask him to intervene. So he relented and said he would speak to her daughter.

When “Sir” met with his student, he told her that her mother came to see him, and that she was worried about her staying out late at night. But his student replied, “Oh, I only go to my grammas home.” But he insisted, “Your mother is worried.” And she replied, “My mother doesn’t love me.” And “Sir” insisted that she does, and that is why she came to see him. But his student told him how when her father divorced her mother and left, they were okay together, until strange men came to visit her mother at her home. And one day when she returned home there was a strange man in the house with her mother. She knew her mother was still young and attractive. But then “Sir” said, “You must forgive her. We all make mistakes.” But she refused, and he insisted again, and then she said, “I thought I could trust you to be on my side.” So she stormed out of the classroom, and turned against “Sir.” She didn’t know how to forgive her mother, and was unreconciled.

In another scene, a male student who was always rebelling and standing up to the authority challenged “Sir” to box while in physical education. At first, “Sir” refused to box with him, but then he threw down his gloves at “Sir”, so “Sir” relented and allowed himself to box with the student. “Sir” boxed only defensively, not even attempting to throw a punch, and took many punches in the body and to the head, until he gave the student an upper cut in the mid-section which took away the student’s wind, and he bent over in pain. “Sir” comforted the student until he could catch his breath.

Later the student caught “Sir” in the stairwell and asked him why he didn’t finish him off, why he didn’t knock him out. “Sir” said he was sorry that he threw the punch in anger, but told his student to think about why he didn’t throw another punch. “Sir” was the adult and had mercy on the student, despite his student’s rebellious anger. He showed mercy, perhaps the first bit of grace and mercy he received in his life. His student had to think about why “Sir” didn’t throw another punch and why he

had thrown so many. He had to decide who he would become and how he would choose to live. I believe this incident changed the student. Having received mercy and grace, gave him the opportunity to offer it himself to others.

In our lesson from Paul's letter to the Corinthians for today, Paul talks about the resurrection of the body of the flesh into a spiritual body. The fleshly body is not only a physical body, but is also a way of being. The fleshly body represents the world-view that might make right, that you fight evil with evil and you strike down those who oppose you. This body must die, so a new spiritual body can live instead which has a world-view that truth, forgiveness, mercy, grace and love matters most. When we are offered forgiveness, mercy and grace then we are confronted with a new reality. We can become changed into new and better people. The resurrection life doesn't begin when we die; it begins when we are changed by being forgiven and loved in mercy and grace.

I want us all to remember how like all sinners who trust in themselves, we need to be forgiven and loved. And when we can remember how we have received this forgiveness and love, then we can become agents of God's love as Jesus taught and lived. We become a new creation, a spiritual person, and choose to live like "Sir" and our Lord Jesus to become agents of reconciliation. We can then truly love our enemies, those who still live in the body of the flesh, and have yet to have experienced the grace and mercy they need. We are invited into this ministry of reconciliation in the hope that the love of God may touch others through our lives and help change them for their sake.

Amen.

I propose to show that the challenge to meet the gospel imperative to love our enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you," makes no sense unless you can understand yourself to have received the grace and mercy of God by forgiveness. But if we can remember the grace we have received, then we can become agents of God's love as Jesus taught and lived. We are invited into this ministry of reconciliation in the hopes that the love of God may touch others and help change their lives.

The Collect

O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing: Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Old Testament

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the

land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there--since there are five more years of famine to come--so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.'

And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The Psalm

Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42

Noli aemulari

- 1 Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; *
do not be jealous of those who do wrong.
- 2 For they shall soon wither like the grass, *
and like the green grass fade away.
- 3 Put your trust in the LORD and do good; *
dwell in the land and feed on its riches.
- 4 Take delight in the LORD, *
and he shall give you your heart's desire.
- 5 Commit your way to the LORD and put your trust in him, *
and he will bring it to pass.
- 6 He will make your righteousness as clear as the light *
and your just dealing as the noonday.
- 7 Be still before the LORD *
and wait patiently for him.
- 8 Do not fret yourself over the one who prospers, *
the one who succeeds in evil schemes.
- 9 Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; *
do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil.
- 10 For evildoers shall be cut off, *
but those who wait upon the LORD shall possess the land.

11 In a little while the wicked shall be no more; *
you shall search out their place, but they will not be there.

12 But the lowly shall possess the land; *
they will delight in abundance of peace.

41 But the deliverance of the righteous comes from the LORD; *
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

42 The LORD will help them and rescue them; *
he will rescue them from the wicked and deliver them,
because they seek refuge in him.

The New Testament

1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50

Someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

The Gospel

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said, "I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in

return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a

The Collect

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Old Testament

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

The Psalm

Psalm 99

Dominus regnavit

1 The LORD is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.

2 The LORD is great in Zion; *
he is high above all peoples.

3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; *
he is the Holy One.

4 "O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob."

5 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and fall down before his footstool; *
he is the Holy One.

6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, *
they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.

8 O LORD our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.

9 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the LORD our God is the Holy One.

The New Testament

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

The Gospel

Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.