

2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**GENESIS 45:1-5 RE-UNITED!**

Then Joseph could not restrain himself. . . . He wept aloud. . . . Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed [troubled] in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."

What's the longest you have been apart from loved ones? A week, a month, a year, many years? Being separated from loved ones and friends is difficult. Memories brings back good times and joys, pleasant scenes and faces, familiar aromas and sounds. To be re-united is a definite highlight!

Joseph was separated from his father Jacob and family of eleven brothers for twenty-two years! Parts of this history you surely remember. Many aspects of it apply well to our own lives. Father Jacob had two wives (who were sisters, mind you), Leah the oldest and the first wife and Rachel the second. In Old Testament times, bigamy and polygamy were practiced by people of God. God never approved of it. It never was His design for marriage. He tolerated it. It brought sorrows of its own—competition between the wives and children. Rivalry between Rachel and Leah over the number of children born led each of them to give her maidservant to Jacob for more children. What a state of affairs. In our own society and in our own families and extended families, how much misguided marriage practice God tolerates!—resulting in our own grief.

Jacob had twelve sons from four "wives." Rachel was his favorite wife, and her son Joseph—number eleven and for many years the youngest, until Rachel had another son Benjamin—was the favorite. Joseph was openly favored by his father. Jacob gave him a special coat—often translated into English "a coat of many colors." Favoritism by a parent is a recipe for family disaster. Of course the devil knows that and pushes it. Do you show favoritism?—sometimes unwittingly? Pray the Lord for forgiveness, and strive to correct it. Were you, are you, one of the un-favored ones in your family? Strive to forgive as the Lord has forgiven you, calmly speak with your parents about it, and proceed in love, not hate, in spite of it.

Joseph was hated by his ten older brothers—half-brothers. When he was seventeen, they considered killing him, but "mercifully" sold him to slave-traders, to be a slave in Egypt, never to be seen again. Things did not go smoothly for Joseph in Egypt. He did well under his master Potiphar, but was falsely accused by Mrs. Potiphar and was cast into prison. He became the steward of the prison-warden, and by God's hand, he interpreted the dreams of two of the Pharaoh's (the king's) chief servants. When re-instatement came for the one, as Joseph had said, that servant forgot about Joseph and his unjust imprisonment. Two more years went by. I wonder how often Joseph longingly thought about his family back home, his youth, and his happiness? That was in the past and one cannot live in the past, or God would put you there. Joseph moved forward trusting the Lord. ----- Have you ever gotten the short end of the stick? Do you groan and feel sorry for yourself? Maybe Joseph needed these rough spots in life to pry him away from the "perky" attitude he developed as Dad's favorite? Rough spots in life are sometimes of your own doing. Yet your forgiving heavenly Father direct all things for your good and the good of others in His everlasting Kingdom—a gift to you in Jesus your Savior who won your forgiveness at the cross and left the grave alive, victorious for you.

Joseph was now thirty. It had been thirteen years since he had been separated from his father and home. God had not forgotten him. God sent Pharaoh two unusual dreams. The chief servant now remembered Joseph in prison! Joseph was brought before Pharaoh. With God's help Joseph interpreted the dreams. He offered wise advice to the king. Grain should be stored up during the next seven years of bumper crops in order to have sufficient for the seven years of famine to follow. Pharaoh was pleased! He made Joseph second in command in Egypt! The Lord, who controls the future, leads our lives in ways that we can't begin to foresee, for our personal good and the good of His people. Example: "How did you happen to meet your wife, or husband?"

During the seven years of bounty, Joseph imposed a 20% tax on all grain harvested. No one complained! So much grain was stored, that that the total could not be tracked! Seven years of famine began to follow. When the peoples' grain was gone, Joseph opened the warehouses and began to sell the grain. Surely Joseph could begin to see the blessed role God had held in store for him to save the lives of many. Shortly he would see it even more clearly.

Two years into the famine, his ten older brothers showed up to bow before him and buy grain for their families and father back in Canaan. What an opportunity for Joseph! Paybacks are sweet, right? He recognized them, but they did not recognize him. It had been twenty-two years. Joseph was now thirty-nine. People change quite a bit from seventeen to thirty-nine. Nor were they faintly expecting to see him, certainly not as the vice-Pharaoh of Egypt! Joseph asked about their family and father. Then he accused them of being spies and sent them to prison for three days! He later told them that one of them could go home to get the youngest brother to prove they were not liars and spies.

Have you, do you, at times seek to get revenge or get even? That is not what the Lord wants. Jesus said: *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,* ⁴⁵ *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* ⁴⁷ *And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)*

Can you guess what was the first thing to come out of the mouth of one of the brothers, after hearing Joseph's demand? "God has found us out! This is because of the way we treated our brother." Twenty-two years had gone by and their guilt was right there! They had never admitted their sin to their father nor to God. They had no assurance of forgiveness. Do not let sin go unresolved in your heart and life. It will eat at you all life long. Repent. Seek forgiveness from God and from man. In Christ there is peace.

Joseph was not bitterly trying to get even. He was providing them with an opportunity to show repentance and a change of heart from the way they had treated him. He was setting them up to see how they would treat their father's new favorite, Benjamin, Joseph's full brother.

Joseph put Simeon back in prison and sent the other nine home with food and with their money in their sacks. He was keeping them off balance. They explained to their aged father what had happened, that they would need to take Benjamin along as proof of their truthfulness in order to free Simeon. Then they were then appalled to find their money in their sacks. Already they were viewed as spies, now surely thieves too! Father Jacob was distraught. The day finally came when they had to return. Father Jacob objected to taking Benjamin, but finally yielded to the Lord, "If I am deprived, I am deprived."

This time the brothers were treated well. They had proven they were not spies! They tried to returned their money, but Joseph's servant said he already had their money! They were invited to Joseph's house to dine and were surprised to be seated according to age. Benjamin received five times as much! In the morning they received more grain and started out, surely with a spring in their step. However, . . . Joseph had ordered his servant to put his special silver cup into the sack of the youngest. Not far from the city, they were overtaken by the servant and accused of thievery, which they adamantly denied. They were so sure of their innocence, that they ventured to say, "Whoever has it will die." The servant said, "No. He shall remain here as a slave." From the oldest to youngest they were searched. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Can you feel their hearts collapsing within them? Not Benjamin! They went back to the city to face Joseph. Joseph harshly reproved their foolishness. What could they say? Brother Judah humbly stepped forward to talk with Joseph directly. Without the cold, hard hearts that the brothers had shown years earlier, Judah explained that he could not bear the grief it would cause his father if they came back without Benjamin. He would stay in Benjamin's place. None of the brothers contradicted. The brothers had changed. They would have never made such an offer twenty-two years earlier for Joseph.

What a touching scene. Similarly, who offered himself in your place? A descendant of this same Judah—Jesus of the tribe of Judah! Your Savior went willingly as a captive that you go free—forgiven! At this point Joseph's heart could hold out no longer. "I am Joseph!" and he wept freely being re-united with his brothers. He assured them that he was not angry, that he would take care of them, that they should go back and bring their father, families, and all livestock to live in Egypt until the end of the famine. (Actually, they would stay much longer!). The brothers were shocked and afraid. Such love and forgiveness is totally foreign to sinful human nature. But Joseph had come to treasure the promises of God given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3)—the he rescuing Savior would come! Joseph was soon re-united with His father! Jacob was 130. He die in Egypt at 146 and was buried in the land of Canaan, the Land of Promise.

You and I also have such a joyous reunion awaiting us after the great Resurrection and entrance into heaven. In forgiveness and love, we will be with our Lord and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ! What a day for tears of joy that will be!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---