

Reconnecting  
Genesis 45:1-15  
August 17, 2008

I have really enjoyed being able to spend some time walking with you through the wonderful stories found in the book of Genesis. But unfortunately we once again we take a big jump in the Biblical story.

We last left Joseph as he was on his way to Egypt, after being sold into slavery by his brothers.

But a great deal happens in the Biblical story before we get to this story

He is sold into the house of an official of Pharaoh. Potipher, the official's wife gets the hots for Joseph and tries to get him to go to bed — he refuses — she cries rape and he ends up in jail.

While in jail Joseph gets the Pharaoh's attention by being able to interpret some dreams that had been keeping him awake at night.

Because his interpretation of the Pharaoh's dreams proved to be correct, Pharaoh made Joseph an official in his court.

A famine has hit Palestine, so Israel (Jacob) has sent his son's (except Benjamin) to Egypt to buy food.

While in Egypt, Jacob recognizes his brothers, but of course, they don't recognize him so he accuses them of being spies and requires that they bring Benjamin to Egypt. When they get ready to leave, Joseph has the money that they paid for the grain returned to their sacks, and requires Simeon to stay in jail until they return with Benjamin.

They don't return immediately, not until they run out of food and need to go back to Egypt to get some more food.

They bring Benjamin with them this time. After they buy their grain, and once again Joseph has the money put back into their sacks but this time he has his silver cup put into Benjamin's sack.

After they are a little ways out of town, Joseph sends his servants out to stop and accuse them. They of course plead their innocence. They go so far as saying:

(Genesis 44:8-9 NRSV) Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? {9} Should it be

found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

Well of course, it is found in Benjamin's sack. Benjamin is taken into custody and the brothers try to get him free by offering themselves in his stead.

And then we get to our story today.

(Genesis 45:1-15 NRSV) Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. {2} And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. {3} 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. {4} 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. {5} And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. {6} 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. {7} God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. {8} 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. {9} 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. {10} 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. {11} 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.' {12} And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. {13} You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." {14} Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. {15} And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Mustafa is a truck driver.

In the aftermath of January 2005's tsunami in Southeast Asia, he had no idea where his 5-year-old daughter, Rina, might be.

When he was reunited with her, he held her in his arms, overwhelmed with emotion. He fell to his knees and and cried out his daughter's name over and over. "By the grace of God! I knew you were alive! I knew it!" Mustafa screamed at the reunification. "My precious little one, I did not give up. I kept looking."

"Mustafa was on his way to Medan, miles away from Banda Aceh, when the devastating tsunami hit. When he returned home he discovered his wife and daughter were missing. Unfortunately, Rina's mother is still missing.

But father and daughter were together again.

We can understand the very human need for reconciliation — whatever the cause of the initial breakup.

And that's why the Genesis story is so powerful.

It's a story that reminds us that when we've experienced awful separation it's possible to move to awesome reconciliation.

Evil is turned into good, and loss transformed into gain.

Events like this can help us gain a fresh understanding after an experience of failure, and a new sense of purpose after a time of pain.

It's a story of estrangement and reconciliation, and it's an account that unfortunately reflects some of the pain we all experience from time to time.

The big question of course, is what can we learn from this story that can help us overcome our own estrangements?

First —> We must extend an invitation.

Notice that Joseph says to his brothers, "Come closer to me" (45:4).

It is so hard to make the first move. But we need to remember that the goal of reconciliation is to restore harmony and trust between those who have been offended. If we want to reunite, it may need to begin with an invitation from us to the offender to "come closer."

This is not an invitation to overlook, or dismiss what happened. It's simply a mechanism to close the gap, to begin to see each other as human beings sometimes tortured by emotions and forces beyond our control.

Personal space is a cultural issue.

Most Americans are uncomfortable when the three-foot bubble is invaded. We don't like people "in our face." I had a Dean at Duke who always like to get too close to you when he spoke to you. We often ask people to get "out of our face," meaning that they should leave us alone.

The Middle Eastern culture has no such qualms about the three-foot bubble. Visit the marketplaces in Israel, or the West Bank, and you'll see people haggling over price face to face, nose to nose.

"Come closer" is an invitation to begin a process.

Instead of saying, "Get out of my face," we're saying, "Get in my face."  
Get in my space.

We can't begin the journey to reconciliation when we are so far apart, with you sitting on one side of the room, and me on the other side.  
Come closer. Let's talk.

The second lesson is —> Forgive.

Joseph says, "And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here" (45:5).

Let go of the offender's involvement in your life. Let God deal with those who have caused the estrangement.

When Jesus says that we must forgive "seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22), Jesus is not suggesting that we keep count. Jesus is implying that there must be no limit to our forgiveness.

What makes this such a hard saying is the notion that forgiveness is something we must do 77 times. If I must forgive someone 77 times, it's a sure indication that the person who is offending me doesn't get it. He or she is obviously not mending their ways.

But that's the point!

Forgiveness is not about keeping score!

It's not something we do for the other guy; it's something we do for ourselves. Forgiveness is not an action; it is an attitude.

When we understand that forgiveness is not about heroic deeds, but about a

heroic attitude, what Jesus says makes perfect sense. You can count actions, but you can't count attitudes. Jesus doesn't keep a forgiveness score.

It would have been easy for Joseph to keep his brothers at arm's length, instead of inviting them to get in his face. It would have been easy for him not to forgive. Instead, Joseph says, "Don't be angry with yourselves."

The third lesson is —> Be a part of the solution.

"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" (45:11).

Joseph was not about to "forgive," and then simply write them off, or blow them off. He enters fully into their circumstances, and he takes action to help them "come closer," to help them find wholeness again.

In one of Aristophanes' comedies, an aged farmer staggers onto the stage. He is weeping. Enemy soldiers have invaded his land, terrorized his family, killed both of his oxen. His family is pitifully hungry.

But when he's asked what he wants, instead of asking for something to eat or something to drink, he says,  
 "What I want more than anything else is for a drop of peace to be poured into my eyes."

Likewise Joseph. Likewise us.

Peace poured into our eyes.

If any of you watched the Olympics on Friday you may have seen a sad example of reconciliation not taking place.

It was in Beach Volleyball. Phil Dalhausser, and Todd Rogers of the United States defeated Martin Laciga and Jan Schneider of Switzerland.

Martin Laciga used to be partners with his older brother Paul. They were partners for close to nine years. At the end of the first year, their father suggested that they stop talking to each other on the court because it was usually bickering. For the last 8 years that they competed they did not talk — and still do not talk.

The most powerful image that they showed was from the 2004 Olympics in

Athens. Martin and Paul were playing together and at the end of a point that they won, Paul turned to Martin to offer to him a high 5, but Martin turns his back and walks away.

That is not the way it is supposed to be!

If we want to be together again with those who have been so long apart, we'll see in the Joseph story a model to help us make it happen.