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Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, November 15, 2009

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

Mind Games and a Curious Whisper

Genesis 43 – 46:7

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“Mind Games and a Curious Whisper”

Genesis 45-46:7

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. The Word asserts that God is the author of life; of all beginnings. The Word asserts that embracing your grief and hearing God’s whispering forgiveness will heal your heart.

The tagline to A & E’s Biography series is “You’re either ‘Biography’ or you’re not.” Being biography is missional. Joseph is biography material. Joseph is missional. In fact, his life story was made into a movie and was the subject of one of the most successful shows on Broadway; “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.” Joseph was one of twelve brothers. Ten of his brothers were born to Leah and two handmaids. Two were born to Rachel. Jacob had a special affection for Joseph.

As the story goes, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers who told their father he was attacked by a wild animal. He was imprisoned in Egypt for a crime that he did not commit while serving as a slave. Joseph was ignored by the Butler and Baker after meeting them in prison and interpreting their dreams, but recognized with the position of governor for interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams. As a governor, he controlled the country’s food supply. A famine hit Joseph’s home country and his brothers went to Egypt looking for food. They did not recognize Joseph, but Joseph did them. And Joseph wanted them to bring Benjamin back to Egypt. Jacob finally agreed to send the brothers back to Egypt with Benjamin. He sent the best products of the land, double the amount of silver they took the first time in hopes that God would grant mercy through the governor. Joseph received his brothers. He brought them to his house. Joseph sent them back home with sacks full of grain, their silver and Simeon. Joseph put his silver cup in Benjamin’s bag. Shortly after the brothers began their journey home, Joseph sent his steward and

accused the brothers of stealing from him. There they found Joseph's silver cup. The mind games continued between Joseph and his brothers. When would the brothers come to know that the governor was their brother, Joseph? The brothers returned to Joseph, confessed their innocence and the embracing of grief, hearing of God's whispering forgiveness and healing of the heart began.

Joseph was a man of passion for his family. The dilemma is clear: the brothers were guilty; Joseph was wronged. He could have given his brothers a long speech about the terrible things they had done to him. He could have said, "Now it's your turn; you will suffer as I have suffered." But Joseph wasn't interested in revenge. He just wanted to let the offense go. Joseph was able to forgive. Joseph was just like Jesus who forgave the Canaanite woman.¹

Joseph was impacted and transformed by his brothers' mistreatment. The family bond was deep for Joseph. Joseph could not resolve the family brokenness by an act of Egyptian sovereignty. It required an act of Israelite passion, an act of salvation. The power to create newness does not come from detachment, but from risky, self-disclosing engagement. The guilty fear of the brothers was superseded. The grief of the father was resolved. The revengeful cunning of the successful brother was superseded. The guilt of the brothers, the grief of the father and the revenge of Joseph were all used as means for this disclosure of the hidden and mysterious call of God. The whole family was brought to a new moment. Joseph was used by God to prepare the way for his family. His family would become a great nation in Egypt and the promise made to Abraham would continue. The purposes of God had been worked in, with and under sordid human actions. Quoting Karl Barth, "It is not, then, the creature which works in God's working, but God himself who works on and in His own working."²

Joseph understood this: when you release the offender, you release yourself. As long as you hang on to bitterness and resentment, you will never be free. God is willing to turn the mistreatment in your life into blessing. Release the offender. Augustine said, "If you are suffering from a bad man's injustice, forgive him, lest there be two bad men."³ Or take Archibald Hart, "Forgiveness is relinquishing my rights to hurt back."⁴ Forgive whoever you have to forgive. Release the offender. But that's not all. Repay the offender with kindness. This is what Joseph did

¹Matthew 15:21-28

²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, 111.

³Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1997), 155.

⁴Ibid., 154.

for his brothers. In spite of the fact that he had been sold as a slave for 20 shekels many years before, Joseph repaid his brothers with kindness.

If you've been mistreated, repay the mistreater with kindness. When Norman Vincent Peale wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking*, he was lambasted by many theologians and religious leaders. One leader, the Methodist Bishop of New York State, was particularly outspoken in his criticism of Peale, to the point of publishing mean-spirited articles about him. Dr. Peale was also a featured book reviewer for a national magazine and a book by this hostile Bishop came across his desk. Here was his chance to get even, to say everything back to this man that had been said about him. So, how did Peale review the book? Peale said, "It was a fine piece; accordingly I wrote a favorable review."

It seems outrageous to do good to someone who has gone out of their way to do harm to you, but that is exactly what God has called us to do. And, in this, he leads by example. Jesus was beaten, mocked and spat upon. He had done nothing to justify such treatment. And while he was hanging on a cross he didn't deserve to bear, he said, "Father, forgive them." Each of us has gone through such a time of rebellion when we have, so to speak, spat upon the love of God. Still, he offers us his unconditional love...his all-encompassing forgiveness. Though we rejected him, he repaid us with kindness. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."⁵

The inability to forgive inhibits relationships, self, life, ministry and the advancement of the kingdom. Forgiveness is at the core of redemptive history. God's plan of redemption is to forgive, thus restoring humanity to himself. That is the gospel. That is the point of ministry. That is why the church exists.

The inability to forgive thwarts stewardship. Stewardship is all about forgiveness; stewardship of time, talent and treasure. Our motivation for giving, financially and otherwise, must be rooted in forgiveness. As we continue to build dynamic adult, children and student ministries, support missionaries around the world, prepare a new generation of Deacons as shepherds to serve the members in their parishes, serve the city of Wichita through "Serve and Celebrate" and LOVE Wichita, mobilize the congregation through Crown Ministries small groups to experience financial freedom, develop our four worship services in the reformed tradition and engage our presbytery in missional reformation, we demonstrate forgiveness. We continue to fulfill the great ends of the Church which are "the proclamation of the gospel for salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the

children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.”⁶

What is God’s view of the stewardship of money? God uses money for our benefit and the advancement of his kingdom. First, *God uses money to strengthen our trust in him*. It is often through money that God can clearly and objectively show us that he is in total control, if we will trust Him and accept our positions as stewards and managers of his possessions.⁷ Second, *God uses money to prove his love*. God’s Word tells us that God assumes the responsibility of providing the basic necessities for everyone who trusts in him.⁸ Third, *God uses money to demonstrate his faithfulness*. Moses reminded Israel that it was God who would give them the power to make wealth.⁹ And fourth, *God uses money to unite followers of Jesus in blessings*. God will use the abundance of one follower of Jesus to supply the needs of another.¹⁰ Money united Joseph’s brothers in their resolve to tell the truth. Once we understand how God uses money, we generally become more familiar with his plans and purposes for our lives.

You received a letter from me three weeks ago speaking to our ministry as the hands, feet, arms, mind, ears, eyes and voice of Jesus to others. Use the stewardship financial commitment card as a tool for your own discipline. There will not be an ingathering Sunday this year. The Bible teaches tithing. We are to be people changed by the Word. We are going to do ministry that glorifies God and furthers the kingdom. We will have a balanced budget in 2010. You will give as biblical followers of Jesus with gratitude for what God has done in your life and the ministry of Eastminster through his forgiveness.

Being church is being the best Jesus someone sees. The ministries of the church require money. Look how God used money in Joseph’s brothers’ lives. Joseph gave them the grain they bought and their money back as well. Joseph held no grudges. Joseph held no view of his self importance. Joseph trusted the promise God made to Abraham. He forgave his brothers. We want to be a church which uses money to strengthen our trust in God, prove his love, demonstrate his faithfulness and unite followers of Jesus in blessings. Being the church necessitates experiencing and giving forgiveness.

⁵Romans 5:8

⁶*The Book of Order*, G-1.0200

⁷Matthew 6:32-33

⁸Matthew 7:11

⁹Deuteronomy 8:18

¹⁰Acts 2:42

God desires all relationships to be reconciled: to him in and through Jesus Christ and with one another. “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited; Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”¹¹

Repay mistreaters with kindness. Recognize God’s hand in your life. Release the offender, because in doing so you release yourself. Repay the offender with kindness. Our view of money often informs the reason for the wrong and the making of things right. Embrace your grief, hear God’s whispering love of forgiveness and heal your heart. Assist others in embracing their grief, hearing God’s whispering forgiveness and healing their hearts. Let us pray!

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¹¹Romans 11:25-27