

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday after Trinity
Genesis 50:15-21
June 28th, 2015

When I was born my mother named me, “Look, a son!” Not such an exciting name, I suppose, but I suspect my mother Leah was surprised that she was blessed by God with a son for her first child, especially since the Bible says specifically that she was hated. I think the reason she was hated is because her sister, Rachel, was loved so much by my father, Jacob.

Good morning, my name is Rueben. I’m the first born son of Jacob and Leah. I’m not here this morning to tell you my personal story. No, I’m here to talk to you about grief. Yes this grief involves my life, but mostly this grief comes before my brothers and me through one of our other brothers, Joseph – about whom you heard in the Old Testament text for today.

You see, this all started with a coat of many colors and a dream. Joseph was our father’s favorite son because he was the first born of his wife Rachel, the one he loved so much more than my mom, her sister Leah. I know, strange family dynamics. My brothers were always angry with Joseph because he was favored one, the one most loved. They got so mad at him one day that they wanted to kill him. This is the first time I had much grief over Joseph and what my brothers proposed to do. Instead of killing him while out in the field tending to our father’s flocks, I convinced my brothers to throw him in a large hole – a dry cistern. Then, behind my back, they sold him to some Ishmaelite travelers on their way to Egypt. Oh the grief. Then, you may have remembered the story, we took some of his clothes and covered it with lamb’s blood to make it look like some kind of animal killed him in the fields. Real grief was had by my father.

The next time of grief is when we had to travel to Egypt. A ruler in Egypt, at that time we didn’t know it was Joseph, demanded that on our return trip we bring our youngest brother Benjamin with us. When I broke the news to dad, he was greatly grieved. He was so scared to lose young Benjamin, who is now his favorite, since he has already lost Joseph. I promised that I would take care of him. As a matter of fact, I told dad that if I didn’t, he could have my two sons. We had to bring Benjamin with us. That was the demand of the Egyptian ruler.

And now, the grief over what happened in the Old Testament text appointed for this day. After we discovered that our brother Joseph was alive, after we found out that he was actually that ruler we were talking to in Egypt, after we brought our father Jacob to live in the rich plenteousness of Egypt, our father got ill and died. Joseph went back home to the promised-land and buried our father. We were so afraid that when Joseph returned, he would do us in for what we did to him. We made up a mandate and said that our father wanted us to be protected and not harmed. This grieved Joseph because he had already forgiven us and seen how God’s plan – a plan that we meant for evil was actually used for the sake of His children. And then Joseph spoke these words that were music to our ears – “*So don’t fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.*” Thank God for this. What a relief. Our grief and fear has been relieved by forgiveness we do not deserve.

My sins are severe. So are the sins of my brothers. We hated with our heart and thus broke the fifth commandment. We deceived our father and thus broke the fourth commandment. And, we broke every other command in between as well. Now, you might not think that your story is anything like my story – the one I just told you. But that is where you are wrong.

Hearts filled with hate – hate over whatever there is out there to hate... hate the way people are treating you... hate how much in taxes you had to pay this year... hate the way that person talks, the way things are done, the job you have, the people in charge – hate, hate, hate. Beloved, hate

will destroy you. Hate evil, hate sin, hate the devil, but love one another – even if others hate you. Love does not come from hate. Love only comes from the Lord. This was a lesson my brothers and I needed to know. This is a lesson for you as well. In Christ, forgive and love.

A great example of this is happening in response to a hate-filled act of one man killing nine parishioners at a prayer service in South Carolina. Instead of responding to this hate with rioting, the people are responding with prayer. Prayer for those families and prayers for this man who, with hate, killed those innocent people. While others hate... you love.

Look at those words on the back of your bulletin from the Old Testament text for today. Let's read together those words from Joseph in bold... "*Do not fear...*"

In the face of hate toward us, in the face of those who come out against us... to those who have hurt us deeply but have come to ask for your forgiveness, say these words. Because words like that bring exactly what the last line of our text for today say for those who come to you... "*Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*" Those words and Joseph's actions brought comfort to them. Oh how we need and covet comfort in times of distress. Oh how we need to hear it from the lips of our Lord into our frail lives right at this very moment.

Joseph comforted his brothers. Have you ever been so relieved that it felt like the weight of the world was lifted off of your shoulders? That's the way we felt when we heard from Joseph his comforting word and witnessed his kind actions. Right then and there we needed that more than anything. We deserved his wrath, but he did not give it to us. We hated our brother but he did not hate us back. We wanted to see him gone from our lives for good, but when the Lord brought us together again, he wasn't hateful to us, he received us back with joy like Jesus does with the lost sheep when that sheep returns. What comfort Joseph shows to his brothers who deserve none of that. And that kind of thing is so hard to believe could be possible. Not only in my day, but in this day as well.

Of course the greatest example of the one who gave us what we did not deserve is Jesus. Joseph really does give us an Old Testament type of what Jesus would be for you and me today. No, Joseph was not perfect like our Lord. But Joseph loved in the face of adversity. When he could have crushed us – he instead loved us and even more... gave us life in the land of Egypt where they had prepared for the great famine that ravaged all the lands for many years. Jesus does the same. In this spiritually deprived world, Jesus pours out what we need – the food and sustenance for the soul. It's a spiritual famine out there. Everything working against what is the most important and valuable for you. But Jesus keeps on pouring out – sustaining, promising, love, giving, supporting and reminding us that He will never leave us even when everyone else including the world already has. How blessed it is to know this is true.

It seems like all we see today is hate, violence, treachery... you name it. It's terrible out there. But in the midst of it all... In treachery's face, remain faithful to the one who will remain faithful to you. In a world of hate, love. I've seen enough hate to go around. So have you. Look at Joseph. Look at your Savior Jesus. Hate evil and love good. And know the Lord calls us to love one another because He first loved us. How do we know? Just look at that cross. We see a love beyond understanding when we look at that cross. We see a love unfathomable. And hear those words time and time again. Say them to yourself, "*Do not fear, I will provide for you...*" Words from Joseph? Yes! Words from our Lord Jesus. Absolutely! Count on it!! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.