

Reconciliations Genesis 45:1-15; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:10-28; Psalm 133 8-14-05

We live in a country that is at war-- and in a world that is at war with itself far too often. It seems that people of goodwill and clear vision always search for peace and for the best ways to best achieve it. It has been said that, "If women ran the world we would enjoy peace far more often than we do at present." I am sorry to say that I am not sure that it would matter. Have you ever heard the little phrase, "deadlier than the male?" The gender of a person does not seem to determine what is in that person's heart. I have known many men who have longed for peace and reconciliation with others, and in our world, just as ardently as do many women.

One of those men appears in our scripture readings this morning, or, perhaps, there are really two of them who practice reconciliation in different ways.

The story of Joseph continues from where we left off last week when we saw him sold into slavery. Much had happened to him during his years in Egypt. He had found himself in prison after a little go round with his master's wife, had interpreted a few more dreams while locked up and had managed to end up as a major player in the government. His dream interpretations had helped him guide Egypt into a solid position for the years of famine that fell over that part of the world.

His father, Jacob, knowing that Egypt had vast stores of grain, sent ten of his remaining sons to see if they could secure food so that they could survive those difficult times. Benjamin, the youngest brother did not go with them on the first trip. Jacob was afraid he would lose him if he went along, he was the closest brother of Joseph's, having been born to Rachel, also.

Joseph recognized his brothers on their first trip for provisions, but did not reveal himself to them at that time. He sold them grain and asked that they return with their younger brother. He held Simeon as collateral.

Of course, as we know from our reading, the brothers returned later with Benjamin in tow, and, after a lot of weeping and soul-searching on the part of Joseph, he revealed himself to them as their long-lost brother. Good had come out of their evil act, forgiveness abounded and the family was reconciled. Joseph made certain of that.

We do not know how long it took him to achieve a sense of pardon for the wrong his brothers had done to him. It might have been years. But, he had come to the realization that there had been a reason for all that had happened to him. He now had the opportunity to help those who had treated him so shoddily.

Joseph's type of reconciliation is one that touches us most deeply. Joseph had moved from being a selfish, strutting young man to one full of wisdom and strength. He had learned that life was not all about him but about others. We can only assume that his brothers had moved in the same direction. That is half the battle in bringing about a reconciliation of any type—realizing that others have as much value as we do. When we are able to make things right with those we care about, after we have somehow gone astray and become estranged and a reconciliation follows, there can be nothing better. It is always a two way street.

Jesus had a reconciliation of another kind in this morning's reading from Matthew. First, Jesus reminds his disciples that it is not what goes into a person that defiles that person but what emerges from his or her heart. While many tell us that the books we

read, the movies we see or the television we watch have terrible effects on us, Jesus tells us, in effect, that does not need to be so.. We may put all of the junk into our selves that we want to and it does not matter. It is what we do as we process the junk. We need to remember that, as the followers of Christ, we have a very potent filter that should keep us from injuring others with whatever it is we carry around within ourselves. We have the responsibility to see to it that we act and react in proper ways to the world around us. This part of the reading has always provided me with much food for thought. In effect we need to reconcile all the raw material we gather into our selves with the product that emerges and reveals us as we truly are.

But the greater reconciliation, for me, lies in the rest of this section of Matthew. I have always considered Jesus a very inclusive person in his life and teachings. The second part of the scripture we looked at a few minutes ago, infers that his concept of his mission began with a narrow scope. He was not sent to save everyone, just those members of the lost tribes of Israel.

The Canaanite woman he met was very insistent and pointed out that she would take just the scraps of his teachings, just the bits he might be willing to give her and that she knew her child would be made well. She had tremendous faith in him and his healing ability. He saw this and had mercy. He reconciled his own thoughts about his mission to the situation at hand. Did this alter his concept forever? We do not know. But there must have been a broadening of his sense of mission because of this encounter.

Years ago, we might have referred to this action of Christ's as an exercise in "situation ethics." Instead of having hard and fast rules in the realm of ethical behavior, such rules could flex and move considering the situation that posed itself. Situation ethics was developed by an Anglican theologian named Joseph Fletcher in the 1960s. His guiding principle was that one should always act in the most loving way. People first, not principles. Now, I know this grates on some of us. But, we must admit, that, in the particular instance that was before Jesus, hard and fast principles about his mission went out the window as he operated from a basis of compassion and love. This does not mean that he lacked principles-- he certainly did not. But it does mean that he was able to apply love when and where it was most needed. He was able to take all the stuff that came to him from his outside world and through the filter of understanding, patience and kindness produce a caring response.

It is hoped that we can do the same. We can't, all the time. We can't be as forgiving as Joseph following his ordeal. Our circumstances are not the same. Our blessings might not appear to be as great. And we can't always be as loving as Jesus. We may think and hope we can be, but we can't. Remember, he had his human moments, too, moments of anger, fear and questioning God. He simply was far better than we are at reconciling the struggles he had in life with the will of God, as he understood it..

So, Alice what is the good news? Is there any hope for us? As God granted Joseph another chance to make things right with his family and as Jesus gave the Canaanite woman's daughter another chance, so we, too, are granted another chance to make all things right. We just need to process all the junk that comes into us from our world and others through the filter of Christ's teachings and find the way to a loving reconciliation that has been before us all along. Amen