

Family Relations
A Sermon by Mr. Tom Mason
Sunday 20th February 2022

Psalm 37:7-7, 39-40 Genesis 45th3-11; Luke 6:27-38

My mother came from Rothesay on the Island of Bute in Scotland. It is a small scenic islands that sits in the firth of Clyde, with the mountains of Argyll and the Mull of Kintyre visible on a clear day, as the westerly back drop, with the Kyles of Bute and where the shape of Loch Long in the North may be found, a place where the piers of Dunoon and Wemyss Bay are visible on the mainland, as the River Clyde passes upstream to Greenock, and starts to narrow by Dumbarton rock, and where the waters of the river lead directly into the heart of the city of Glasgow.

The population of Rothesay and the Isle of Bute is around 9,000. I am probably related to half of the population. The first question that anyone would ask when I visited was, who are your family, or "who do yae belong tae?" Family ties you see, are important. These ties were all based on relationships. Good or bad, these relationships made by a whole family from the past and the present influence the perceptions of others for our future. Today many people in our world seem to be searching for a meaning in their lives, for a connection with others that develops into movements that offer a sense of belonging.

Who do we all truly belong too?

Our scripture this morning is a story all about a family relationship and a promise from God, which has become broken over three generations, Abraham, Isaac and Joseph and his brothers, who form the roots of the twelve tribes of Israel. They stray and they wonder away from God, Faithful God brings them back.

As Christians, relationships are where the roots of our faith and our church take hold, grow, develop, or even fade away. It is through the lens of these relationships, that we may be placed in positions of harmonious joy or ones of uncomfortable tension.

A place where we may seem secure in our faith, and a place where we may not.

Situations in our lives where there is a reaction to every action. Or situations where there is no reaction other than silence, where the relationship may be terminated or where it slowly disappears and melts away with an endless separation of space never to be rekindled.

In (Gen 45:3-11) we see the dramatic scene that follows the story of Joseph's growing up, his being sold into slavery, his becoming a dream interpreter for the Pharaoh and his rise to power, as he becomes Pharaoh's man, a ruler over the land of Egypt. The scripture also highlights previously, that Joseph had been arrogant and disrespectful to his brothers as a youth. His actions generated a reaction. For Joseph, his relationship with his brothers is non-existent. The twelve brothers have betrayed him, discarded him, and left him in mortal peril.

Our scripture now shifts towards Joseph and his response towards his brothers. Joseph creates a safe space for his brothers, by sending all the Egyptians who were in attendance away. Joseph's response is unexpected after all the family history that has taken place. Joseph responds not in anger but through reconciliation and love.

The scripture also tells us about Joseph not being able **"to refrain himself."** Joseph emotions act subconsciously, genuinely, God is at work, despite all the terrible actions that have been committed against him, God by his grace, places an unexpected response in his heart.

"I am Joseph" he then says to his astonished brothers. The brothers cannot speak, they are terrified, both due to the powerful position that Joseph holds as a ruler in Egypt, but they are also filled with shame and guilt for what they have done. It is a scriptural passage of responses that come from the heart, true and honest even when it is hard and difficult to take ownership for actions of harm against another. John Calvin describes Joseph's responses to his brothers as being **"rooted in a spirit of genuine softness and tenderness,"** responses that are filled only with love and compassion and for another.

Joseph weeps openly and genuinely, a physical action that shows the emotions of his heart and the presence of God's grace. His first question to his brothers was not one of anger or blame, or of self-pity or self, but that of love, he asks after his father, is he still alive?

Despite all of Joseph's actions of reconciliation and love, the brothers are still troubled and terrified by his unexpected return as they expect a punishment. Joseph continues with his reconciliation; he does not give up.

In verse four, the words of the KJV bible tell us, that Joseph said to his brothers "***Come near to me, I pray you.***" Joseph has become reliant on God's divine providence, on his grace and on his mercy. Joseph now understands that despite straying from God's plan, not understanding, or accepting God's plan, that faithful God is a God that cares for his people, a God who surprises us and who is always present, in the times of plenty and in the times that are not.

Joseph has also experienced a change. From his arrogance and sense of self-importance, by his harsh experiences, in the pit of despair, God has placed him in these difficult places, the unwanted places, the places that make up the story of our life journey.

These are the places where our God shapes us and where he works his mysterious and unknown plans for each of us, (described best by John Calvin as) "*God's divine direction.*" It is in these grey areas, neither black nor white, where our God works and reigns in his majesty and where his grace appears.

The scripture asks each of us, how would I react to my brothers if they had treated me in this way? If they had forsaken me, given me away and placed me in mortal danger? Could I forgive them? Could I reconcile with them? Could I even be in their presence at all? Revenge or anger would seem to be the common response.

Jesus in the gospel of Luke 6:31 Teaches us to: "***Do to others as you would have them do to you.***" – We can find similarities with the teachings of both the Genesis and Luke scripture this morning. Joseph and his brothers have all been humbled, Joseph through his captivity and the brothers by their guilt and shame for their actions and now through their perilous position, where human power has deserted them.

This has brought them all closer to their true selves, their whole and complete selves. Humility may be the virtue that becomes the fruit of the spirit when one's pride is confronted and recognised for what it truly is.

The story also highlights that for a true reconciliation to occur within this family, Joseph must devise a way for his brothers to surrender to him. First, Joseph must not "**judge or condemn**" (Luke 6:28), Joseph must forgive, "**turn the other cheek**" (Luke 6:29), so that the healing process may start for the whole family.

Surrender is a painful, personal process, for both our social and faith relationships. It is this humble surrender to a higher good that leads us into a new life of love and to a deeper sense of joy and gratitude. This is the sign of a reconciliation through the presence of God's grace.

As Joseph and his brothers are brought together, the brothers also face up to their real guilt, their part in the problem, unable to escape or run away.

Joseph said: "**do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life**" (Gen 45:5) the brothers and the family would be saved from the great famine that was to come. God had a reason for all that happened.

They all faced their own frailties, their own vulnerabilities and even their hostilities with each other in this story, it was through this reconciliation in truth and honesty that they came to understand that the divine purpose of God was working in their family.

We are mere mortals, never capable of understanding how, when or where the grace and mercy of our God is at work. It is through a willingness to reconcile our differences with another that all things are possible.

In our faith, we now belong to Jesus Christ.

We love others until they can see good, "**we love our enemies and do good**" (Luke 6:35) until they can see Jesus and where all may become reconciled. A time and place where our sins may be forgiven, and we become the people our God created us to be.

The place where we all belong, the place where we all come from.