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***Loving our Enemies***  
***Genesis 45:3-11, 15, and Luke 6:27-36***

<sup>3</sup> 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.  
<sup>4</sup> 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***.<sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, ***because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life***.<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> ***God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors***.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> ***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.’<sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The story of Joseph begins in Genesis chapter 35 and continues through chapter 50—it’s an ***incredible story*** of jealousy, pride, pain, and forgiveness.

Jacob (Esau’s brother) had 12 sons, but ***Joseph*** was his favorite.  
 So much so that he gave him a ***special coat***,  
 Which meant all the other boys were jealous.  
 Joseph didn’t help matters, because he had a ***dream*** that his brothers were bowing down to him, and he told them so.  
 So, brothers being what they are, and jealousy being what it is,  
 they ended up throwing him into a pit, and then ***selling him*** to Ishmaelites.

He ended up in Egypt with ***Potiphar***, one of Pharaoh’s officials.  
 He gained the respect of the Egyptians,  
 and rose in power until Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him  
 and then accused him of assaulting her—so Joseph went to ***prison***.

It was there he learned his gift of interpreting dreams,  
 which he did for two prisoners, and then he *interpreted* for Pharaoh,  
 which got him out of jail.  
 Soon he was appointed *governor* over Egypt,  
 and all of the grain--during years of famine.

It was during this famine that *Joseph's brothers came to Egypt* looking for food,  
 not knowing that their brother was in charge of the land and the grain.  
 Because they *didn't recognize* him,  
 Joseph demands that they bring back their baby brother Benjamin.  
 Then he *frames* them for stealing,  
 and finally he *reveals* his identity in a flood of emotion and tears  
 in our passage today from Genesis 45.

He treats his brothers, who sold him into slavery,  
 with love, and mercy and forgiveness!  
 The question is, *would WE be able to do the same thing?*

Later, Joseph brings his whole family to Egypt to be saved from the famine,  
 and his father Jacob lives his final days there.  
 In Genesis chapter 50, Joseph's brothers wonder if he will hold a grudge against  
 them, but Joseph reassures them, saying:  
*"Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? 20 Even though you intended to do  
 harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, ..So  
 have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he  
 reassured them, speaking kindly to them.*

Talk about a powerful story---*Joseph does NOT hold a grudge*—  
 he offers them mercy and grace!

Joseph's story is so compelling because it's *so real!*  
 Know any families with a *favorite* child?  
 Ever been *punished* for doing the right thing?  
 We all know families that need to be *reconciled* after past hurts, right?

What we learn from Joseph is *directly related* to Jesus' words in Luke 6 today.  
 And what Jesus has to say is **NOT easy**.  
*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you,  
 pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other  
 also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.*

<sup>30</sup> *Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.* <sup>31</sup> *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

Wow.

*Hearing* this is far easier than *doing* it—at least for me!

We're *not naturally inclined to love* those who hate us, are we?

If someone strikes us on the cheek, do we usually offer the other cheek as well?

It sounds good to say *do unto others as you would have them do to you*—but most of us *don't expect OUR enemies* to love us, do we?

What Jesus asks is *MORE than challenging*.

The world would say it's just *BAD ADVICE—don't do it*.

If you get hurt, hurt them. Hit back.

If you get taken advantage of, retaliate. Seek revenge.

Hold a grudge.

The world would say Joseph had every right to *refuse to feed his brothers*,  
Or to *imprison* them when they arrived in Egypt!

Most of us have family members like his—*people who have hurt us deeply*—  
how easy is it for us to forgive?

How many of us have held onto hurts—for weeks, or even years?

And we're in good company.

Being *merciful or forgiving is not common* today.

After *covid-fatigue*, and societal divisions, we are frequently on edge,

Short-tempered, less inclined to let a driver in,

or allow someone to go in front of us in line,

much less be kind to a clerk who is slowly waiting on customers.

We see *tempers flare* and people hurting each other all the time—  
with words, and sometimes even physically!

*It is NOT a merciful world.*

Which might be *why we REALLY NEED this story, and these words of Jesus*—

*But WHY* does Jesus ask this of us?

First and foremost, this is *who God is*.

Our God is a God of grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

This is why Jesus died and was raised.

Jesus says we are to be like God in Luke 6:36—  
*be merciful just as your Father is merciful.*

God is kind of like *the Bishop in Les Miserables*,  
when Jean Valjean is caught stealing and the bishop saves him, saying—  
here, you forgot to take the candlesticks too!

Jesus asks us to *break the CYCLE of sin and retribution*.  
We've all seen our human tendency to hurt one another, then retaliate,  
And the cycle continues—until someone stops it.  
Until someone takes the high road.  
Until someone turns the other cheek.

Now, does turning the other cheek mean *allowing ourselves to be abused*?  
No, I don't think that's what Jesus is saying—I think he's saying stop the cycle.  
Step back and don't get caught up in retaliation.

Jesus also asks us to show mercy, because it brings us **FREEDOM**.  
When we hold onto grudges, our hearts are literally in *chains*.  
The person who hurt us has *control* over us when we hold onto our anger.  
*Loving an enemy, blessing them, praying for them, forgiving them,*  
*It brings us freedom.*

And forgiveness can happen, *no matter what the other person does*.  
We don't have to *wait on an apology* to forgive.  
We can choose to *let go* of the hurt and be free.  
*Not easy, but so powerful.*

Jesus also asks us to show mercy because it **RESTORES relationships**.  
When we harbor grudges, all our relationships suffer.  
When we let go of pain, through love and mercy, relationships can flourish.

But *HOW do we actually love our enemies*, and bless those who hurt us?

*Well, maybe we CAN'T.*  
Maybe it's not possible, *on our own*.  
Maybe the only way we can love our enemies,  
or forgive and move forward—is *with God's HELP*.

In Genesis, we hear how *Joseph saw the hand of God* in his life,  
Working for good, despite all the harm his brothers caused him.  
I believe Joseph was able to draw upon God's love for him,  
in order to show it to his brothers.

How *much more do we have to draw upon, from Jesus?*

Jesus died for us on the cross, to save us from sin.

He showed forgiveness in the ultimate act of sacrificial love.

What if we *drew upon that grace for us*, to give to our enemies?

Now, we might be saying in our hearts,

*Yea, but I haven't done* some of the horrible things I have seen or heard—  
why should they receive mercy or grace?

Or, *I'm not the one who caused pain*, they did—  
why do they *deserve* love and forgiveness?

But this is *not about who deserves what*, is it?

Romans 5:8 says: *while WE were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

We are all sinners.

And sin is sin.

We all deserve punishment, but God offers us grace.

So we are called to *offer that grace to our enemies.*

In 2004, I had the great privilege of seeing *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*  
speak in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

This Nobel Peace Prize leader spoke so eloquently  
about *loving enemies and forgiving those who hurt us.*

About *loving those we consider 'other'*, 'different', or not worthy of love.

Tutu was Nelson Mandela's appointed Chairman of the

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission* of South Africa, after the end of apartheid.

Apartheid was the country's policy of segregation and discrimination  
against blacks, by the whites of South Africa.

Much like slavery or Jim Crow segregation in our own country.

Tutu led a commission that sought to confront the horrors of apartheid,  
with *forgiveness and reconciliation.*

To understand this, think about *a victim's family*

reconciling with the person who murdered their loved one.

Key to the reconciliation in South Africa was *facing the truth* of what happened,  
 And then offering *forgiveness and grace*,  
 So that new relationships could be formed,  
 and the country could move forward.

It wasn't about making white people feel bad,  
 It was about *learning from the past, so as not to repeat it*.  
 It was about confronting the *senselessness of racism*, and other prejudice,  
 And finding *common ground* as human beings, together.

In 2004 he wrote a wonderful book called,  
*God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*.  
 Tutu talks about the *power of loving an enemy*.  
*How LOVE is the only thing that can transform hurt and pain*.

He says that real reconciliation is possible, *with God's help*—  
 Such reconciliation involves truth, confession, and repentance.  
 It is not enough to let bygones be bygones, to gloss over pain or ignore the past.  
 True reconciliation comes from truth,  
 and the willingness to engage with those who have hurt us.

He also speaks profoundly about *opposing injustice, like racism*, as a Christian,  
 And how he was often criticized for being too political.  
 He writes: (as he opposed apartheid) “*I was told by people in and out of the church  
 that our place was to be concerned with religious matters. But we were involved in  
 the struggle because we were being religious, not political. It was because we were  
 obeying the imperatives of our faith.*” Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, Pg. 64.

Love is not a political act, but it can affect the political arena.  
*Love IS a mandate from God*—from our Savior Jesus Christ.

Tutu has a chapter called “*God Only Has Us*”,  
 and he talks about a *statue of Jesus in Rome without any arms*.  
 It's to symbolize the fact that WE are hands of Christ today.

This means we have to *WORK at following Jesus*, not the ways of the world.  
 Since life with Christ means loving our enemies and forgiving people,  
 then we have to *train for that*.  
 We have to show that kind of love—again and again and again.  
 We may not necessarily *feel* the love, but we *show* it.

A few weeks ago, I mentioned what *C.S. Lewis* said about loving enemies.  
*Don't worry about whether you love them, ACT AS IF you do...*  
 and eventually you will love.

In other words,

***Love. Even enemies. Even if it you don't feel it.***

Today's message is challenging, but *so hopeful!*

When Joseph forgave his brothers, *all of their lives flourished.*

When we forgive, we find freedom, and we can even find *reconciliation*—  
 in our families, our churches, and our world.

When we *love our enemies, and those who are different, LOVE WINS.*

Not prejudice or revenge.

When we *bless and pray* for those who hurt us,

When we *turn the other cheek*, and break the cycle, love wins.

*Love is who God is*—love is what we are *called to do* in this world.

And we can do it, *with God's help.*

*We are loved, so that we can love others.*

So, maybe this week, if we find ourselves about to *lose it*,

Let's take a breath and ask ourselves,

what would *Jesus do in this situation?*

Maybe this week, if we're tempted to nurse an old *grudge*,

Let's ask ourselves, *what if I let this go?*

What if I *choose to forgive*, even if without an apology?

What if I let go of the *weight* of this around my heart?

Maybe this week, if we find ourselves with *unkind thoughts*  
 about someone who is different,

We ask ourselves, *how does God feel* about this person?

How could I *show love* to them?

The mercy and forgiveness and love that God wants of us—  
is such Good news.

**NOT EASY** news—but **GOOD** news!

And it's just the kind of news we need, *to live the new life* Jesus offers.

May we all seek the life of love, mercy, and grace.

And for this life, all God's people can say together, Amen.