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***Love and Forgiveness***  
***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.***

We heard Jesus’ words to us in Luke 6 about loving our enemies,  
And here in Genesis we see Joseph doing just that!

And did you notice something about the Luke 6 passage?  
It starts with Jesus saying  
I say to you ***that listen***....love your enemies....

***That might just be the most important question for us today:***  
***Are we listening?***  
Are we listening to God?

The story of Joseph in Genesis chapter 35 -50—is this ***incredible dramatic story*** of love, and forgiveness.

Jacob had 12 sons, but ***Joseph*** was by far his favorite.

This is where we get the Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat,

Because Jacob gave Joseph a *special coat*,  
 Making all the other boys jealous.  
 Then, Joseph has 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 ends up in Egypt with *Potiphar*, one of Pharaoh's officials.  
 He gains 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, but they forget about him once they were released.  
 Finally, 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,  
 But finally he *reveals* his identity in a flood of emotion and tears  
 in our passage today.

He treats his brothers, with love, and mercy and forgiveness!  
 The question is, *would WE?*

Later, Joseph brings his whole family to Egypt to be saved from the famine.  
 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.*

***Joseph does NOT hold a grudge!***

Joseph's story reminds us that families are tough!  
 How many have a *favorite* child?

How many *punish someone* for doing the right thing?  
 How many have people who need to be *reconciled*?

What we learn from Joseph's story is *directly related* to Jesus' words in Luke 6.  
*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 easier than *doing* it—right?  
 We *do not usually love* those who hate us--  
 We don't usually turn the other cheek, do we?

What Jesus asks is *MORE than challenging*.  
 The world would say it's *BAD ADVICE—don't do it*.  
 If you get hurt, hurt them. Hit back.  
 If you get taken advantage of, 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—*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.  
 With all of our societal divisions, the anger, the hatred...  
 Ever notice how we seem less inclined to let a driver in,  
 or allow someone to go in front of us in line?  
 Do we see people being short tempered? Unkind? Of course we do!

*It is NOT a merciful world.*

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

We also need these words because our God  
*Is a God of grace, mercy, and forgiveness.*

***It's who God is.***

It's why Jesus died and was raised from death.  
 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 is asking us to ***break the CYCLE of sin and retribution.***  
 It is human nature to retaliate.  
 And the cycle continues—until someone stops it.  
 Until someone takes the high road.  
 And turns the other cheek.

Now, does turning the other cheek mean ***allowing ourselves to be ABUSED?***  
 No, that's not what Jesus is saying—he's saying ***stop the cycle.***

Jesus asks us to show mercy, because mercy brings us ***FREEDOM.***  
 When we hold onto grudges, our hearts are in ***bondage.***  
 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 freedom.***

And forgiveness is possible, ***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 very powerful.***

Jesus asks us to show mercy because it ***RESTORES relationships.***  
 When we harbor grudges, ALL our relationships suffer.

But ***HOW do we actually love our enemies***, and bless those who hurt us?  
***Well, you know what?***  
***I don't think we can! We need 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,  
 and then he could show that love to his brothers.

***What about you?***

***Have you ever seen God bring good out of some harm in your life?***

Not that the harm was good,

Or that God caused the harm (God doesn't do that),

But have you ever seen God bring good after some hurt?

***Some people say that everything happens for a reason.***

***I don't think that's true.***

I think that everything happens.

And God can bring good out of even the worst in life.....

***But that is NOT the same as saying that everything happens for a reason,***

***Or that God causes everything to happen.***

Bad things happen.

People hurt us.

But—God is with us.

And God can bring good even out of the bad...just like in Joseph's story.

***God did not cause his brothers to harm him, sell him,***

God did not cause his imprisonment.

But, God did work in Joseph's life.

So, what if WE believed that?

What if we ***drew upon God's love and grace for us,***

So we could give that to our enemies?

Now, we might be thinking

***I haven't done*** horrible things—

Or, ***I'm not the one who caused pain—***

why do they ***deserve*** love and forgiveness?

But this is ***not about deserving***, is it?

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

We are all sinners, deserving punishment, but God offers us grace.

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

One of the most amazing people I've ever heard speak

Is ***Archbishop Desmond Tutu*** of South Africa.

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 Chairman of the

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

Apartheid was the 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*

forgiving the person who murdered their loved one.

Key to reconciliation in South Africa was *facing the truth* of what happened,

And then offering *forgiveness and grace*,

To restore relationships, and the country.

***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 *the racism*,

And finding *common ground* as human beings, together.

In 2004 Tutu 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.***

***Very similar to Martin Luther King Jr's great quote---***

*hate cannot drive out hate, Only love can do that....*

Tutu said that real reconciliation is possible, *with God's help*—  
with truth, confession, and repentance.

It is not enough to gloss over pain or ignore the past.

True reconciliation comes from truth,

and the willingness to engage 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 Jesus Christ.

Sadly today—many Christians hear the words of Jesus himself,

And say that they are ‘too political’.

When in reality, they are the words of our faith.

Tutu has a chapter called *“God Only Has Us”*,

and he mentions a ***statue of Jesus in Rome without any arms.***

Symbolizing 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 following Christ means loving our enemies and forgiving people,

we have to ***train for that.***

We may not necessarily ***feel*** that love, but we ***show*** it.

***C.S. Lewis*** once 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, and ***hopeful!***

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

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

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

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—***

And love is what we are ***called to do*** in this world.

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

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

Let’s take a breath and ask ourselves,

How can I follow Jesus in this situation?

Maybe if we're tempted to hold onto a *grudge*,  
Let's ask ourselves, *what if I let this go?*  
What if I *choose to forgive?*

Maybe 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 love and forgiveness 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.

*Love and forgiveness are key to following Jesus.*  
And for this calling, all God's people can say together, Amen.