**August 16, 2020 Genesis 45:1-15**

***Connecting the Dots***

**Scripture:** *Genesis 45:1-15 NRSV*

*(1)Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. (2)And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. (3)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. (4)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. (5)And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (6)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. (7)God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. (8)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. (9)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. (10)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. (11)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.' (12)And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. (13)You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." (14)Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. (15)And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.*

**Notes:**

1. Who would have ***thought*** they would ever meet again?
   1. How and to what degree is God in ***human*** events.
   2. When there is ***hope***, God is there.
   3. God is about the business of ***healing*** and ***hope***;
   4. There will never be ***reconciliation*** if Joseph doesn’t tell them.
2. Could there be **reconciliation** and ***forgiveness*** after hurt?
   1. Good relationships are built over years of ***commitment***,
   2. Our actions must display ***transparency*** and love.
   3. This story stirs up ***regrets*** and ***hurts***.
   4. Left to our actions, we will live ***divided*** from the ones who love us.
3. ***Restore*** things to the way they’re meant to be?
   1. Get your ***relationship*** with God in the right place.
   2. Work on your own relationship with ***yourself***.
   3. Work on the relationships of your ***life***.
   4. ***Nurture*** the relationships that draw us closer to the Lord.
4. God makes ***possibilities*** out of impossibilities, and ***peace*** out of pain.
   1. When we are busy looking at ***ourselves***, we are too busy to be looking for God.
   2. ***Connect*** the dots, see the big picture; God is there.
   3. Look closely, ***connect*** the dots, find God working to provide opportunities to draw closer to our Lord and Savior.

**Script:**

I have the strength of connectedness, and the strength of connectedness drives me to find connections between myself to people, events, and things. This is how I remember the order in which things happen, how I remember who is related to who; how I connect the events of history with the events of my personal life. I do this in everything. I see how everything is connected in the greater meaning of things.

Perhaps this is why I always enjoyed the connecting the dots worksheets. It was a game we played when we were young where you would connect dots on a page in order to create a bigger picture. You could buy books similar to word searches or coloring books the were filled with these games.

Well, in our passage today we may have to connect the dots to see what God is doing. Last week Joseph was sold by his brothers to Midianite traders heading to Egypt. From there Joseph was taken and sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, a captain of the guard. The Lord watched over Joseph and blessed him; Potiphar took a liking to Joseph and he quickly benefited from his service to Potiphar. Now Joseph was apparently a good-looking young man and Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, but he resisted. Potiphar’s wife set Joseph up and lied to Potiphar saying that Joseph tried to seduce her, and like that Joseph was stripped of his responsibilities and thrown in jail.

While in jail, Joseph became a favorite of the Chief Jailer. Joseph became the overseer of the king's prisoners. Joseph became acquainted to the king’s chief cupbearer and chief baker. One night both of these men had dreams, which Joseph was able to interpret correctly. The cup bearer would be restored to his place of service; and the baker would be killed. After two years the Pharaoh had dreams that nobody seemed to be able to interpret. That is when the cupbearer remembered Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams so he told pharaoh of Joseph.

Pharaoh called for Joseph and He interpreted the Pharaoh’s dream. Pharaoh was pleased; the Lord was watching over Joseph; and pharaoh placed Joseph in a position to care for the crops and storehouses of the kingdom. Joseph rose in position to where he was second only to the Pharaoh himself. In the dreams, Joseph predicted seven years of plentiful followed by seven years of famine. Joseph’s job was very important in making sure that the Egyptian kingdom would remain prosperous not only during the plenteous years, but also during the famine.

And just as Joseph predicted everything went as he said. During the plenteous years Joseph implements a plan to ration supplies so that much of what was harvested was saved back for the famine. And two years into the famine things in the region were getting difficult. Even as far away as Canaan where Jacob and his family resided. SO Jacob sends his ten oldest sons to Egypt in search of supplies for their survival, he kept Benjamin at home. While they are there Joseph recognizes them and devises a plan to get the brothers all together in one place, Egypt. That is where our passage today picks up this story after Joseph’s plan comes to fruition. Join me in the reading of God’s word from Genesis 45:1-15.

*Genesis 45:1-15 NRSV (1)Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. (2)And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. (3)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. (4)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. (5)And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (6)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. (7)God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. (8)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. (9)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. (10)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. (11)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.' (12)And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. (13)You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." (14)Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. (15)And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him. Genesis 45:1-15 NRSV*

Who would have thought that on the day that these brothers sold their 17 year old brother into slavery that they would ever meet again? It is estimated that Joseph is now around 39 years old. He has spent several years in service to Potiphar; then several years in jail because of Potiphar’s wife and her deceit; and the last 9 years in service to Pharaoh, overseeing his crops and governing the land. Joseph has worked hard and honestly for those who had purchased his services. He has been loyal and forthcoming. Now all is coming around full circle. And one must wonder to what degree has God been involved in the series of events that have taken place over the past 22 years of this story.

This passage raises the interesting theological question of how and to what degree God is involved in human events—theologians have been arguing about it for centuries. Are we like puppets with strings that God pulls on a whim? Are we free to make our own decisions and just live with the consequences? No one has come up with an easy answer to that one, but we do know this: whenever there is the possibility of wholeness, healing, reconciliation, connection and hope … you can be sure that God is there and involved somehow. This is at the core of what we believe about God: that God is about the business of healing and hope; maybe not in the ways we’d imagined, but certainly, definitely, when we see hints of these kinds of things, we recognize the fingerprints of God.

What do you think Joseph thought when he saw his brothers? He probably didn’t think right away that God was up to something; instead, all those old feelings of resentment and pain, loneliness and fear surely came to the surface. Though Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn’t recognize him. The text tells us that Joseph questioned them pretty intensely, through an interpreter, securing the information to verify they were who he thought. But Joseph didn’t tell them who he was. Instead, he sent them home, all except Simeon, whom he kept in jail. He instructed them to return with their youngest brother; his full brother, Benjamin, if they ever wanted to see Simeon again.

Jacob didn’t buy into this scheme; it was out of necessity that he relented and allowed Joseph’s wishes to be fulfilled. It took a lot of convincing for Jacob, to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt, but the family ran out of grain, and the brothers knew they could not get more without Benjamin. Judah promised their father he’d be personally responsible and take care of Benjamin; they all knew that if anything happened to Benjamin, that would do their father in. They returned to Egypt and Joseph could hardly bear the sight of his brother, Benjamin; he was so grief-stricken.

Remember, the brothers are still clueless; they don’t know who Joseph is or why he is making all these strange requirements of them, but you know how it is with government offices; you do what you have to do to get what you need. And they needed food for their family. So, Joseph sent the brothers home again with food, but he was still conflicted about what to do. Many would be seeking revenge, but there was that dream from long ago; could there be a chance for reconciliation?

I don’t know what was going through his head, but Joseph planted his very special silver cup in Benjamin’s bag of grain and then sent his guards after the brothers to accuse them of stealing. You can imagine the surprise and drama that is going on! Joseph demands that, as punishment, Benjamin stay on as his slave. But remember Jacob and the state he was in. The brothers knew he could not survive the loss of another child; his next favorite child, too. Judah, who had promised to take care of Benjamin and bring him back safely, was particularly grievous and desperate. He begged Joseph to please let him stay as his slave instead, explaining over and over again why their father could not handle this loss.

And now we find the straw that breaks the camel's back. After all the conspiring, after framing his brothers of crimes; he knows that there would never be an opportunity for reconciliation if Joseph doesn’t tell them who he really is. And then we see the scene we read today, like a really emotional family therapy session. The text tells us that Joseph didn’t want the Egyptians to see how emotional he’d get, so he sent them out of the room, leaving him alone with his still-clueless brothers, who by now were probably thinking they were in really bad trouble.

Crying loudly, so loudly even the Egyptians on the other side of the door could hear him, Joseph breaks down and tells his brothers everything. He told them who he really was, what happened after they sold him into slavery and how he’d come to be in this position of power. He asked after his father again, and clung to his brother Benjamin. Needless to say, the brothers are stunned as well; and still full of fear and full of shame, maybe even more than before. After all, if Joseph has an axe to grind, they would be the recipients. Years of broken relationships; years of isolation and alienation, years of potential relationship wasted. They didn’t know what to do. They were certainly all wondering: could there ever be reconciliation and forgiveness after all that hurt? Could there be forgiveness after all of that hurt?

Not likely. You can’t just waltz back into your family’s life after all that pain and expect things to be just like they were. Good relationships are built over years of commitment, any good family therapist will tell you that. The best approach to having a healthy family is to work things out before you find yourself in a heart wrenching situation like this one, right? Trust needs to be developed; communication needs to take place; honesty needs to be present first and foremost; our actions must present an attitude of transparency and love.

This was not the case between Joseph and his brothers; it’s not the case in many relationships in our lives. All of us can think of relationships in our families or extended families that are strained or broken, some that may even seem lost; not able to be repaired; honesty is doubted, trust is lost, communication does not take place without conflict. It’s all well and good to be thoughtful and intentional about building healthy relationships and working through conflict, but what about when you’re not? What about when communication is breached; what about when trust is broken; and how do we move on when the relationships we thought were unbreakable seem to be severed beyond repair? What do we do?

I do not know of any of us who has sold a sibling into slavery (though many of us may have wanted to). But we read this story and it stirs up feelings; regrets for mistakes we’ve made; hurts for the words we have been told and the actions of others against us; and the regrets for the relationships that have been torn apart. Some of us come to this place today wondering if there might ever be healing; wondering if there may ever be forgiveness; wondering if there may ever be restoration for those relationships in our own lives that have been broken. How could reading this story of dysfunction far beyond even our own help us figure things out?

We can look at this story of a family torn apart by poor choices and unhealthy relationships and allow it to become a framework where we can see the presence and work of God. We must realize if we do not already know, that left to our own desires and actions, we are sure to live lives estranged from the ones who love us most, and the broken relationships that go with it; just look in our own communities: it’s all around us.

But there are also glimpses of promise, wherever God is at work. You see, God is in the business of creating possibilities where there are none. Even in the bleakest of situations and in the darkest of times, we can hope for healing. Because when we enter into the place where God is, his light shines all around us. When we follow God, we know we can trust in him; because He is known for taking the most broken, ripped up parts of life, and doing the impossible, stitching them back together.

If you are in a situation where brokenness reigns; if you are involved in a relationship that seems to be crumbling to pieces; if the affairs of your life seem to be moving out of control; what can you do to restore things to the way they are meant to be? Today I tell you, first and foremost, get your relationship with God in the right place. He should be the number one priority of your life; before your kids, before your spouse, even before yourself. There should be nothing that takes precedence over your relationship with Him.

Next you need to begin to work on your own relationship with yourself. When your self-talk is not what it should be, when it is not Godly; then you do nothing more than tear yourself down and destroy the relationships in your life by making ungodly choices. You need to learn to love yourself the way that God loves you. You need to know that God made you to be who you are; but the way that you are when you are walking in His light and serving Him. Not the selfish you that wants all the pleasure and satisfaction this world has to offer. You need to find fulfillment and satisfaction in being the person God made you to be, in service, in worship, in discipleship, and in fellowship.

After you are on the path to a good self you can begin to look at the relationships of your life. Some may not be healthy for you; relationships with people who are drawing you away from your relationship with God, are not of God, they are destructive. While many people believe that through this relationship, they can help to save the other person; I am afraid this is a lie Satan spreads in order to keep you tied to these dysfunctional relationships. Likewise, we must nurture the relationships that draw us closer to the Lord. Relationships that may have been damaged by our own selfish actions; relationships with family, friends, and even acquaintances that we may know. Foster these relationships because they may be the ones who help you find your place in this world.

Wherever there are signs of life instead of death, reconciliation instead of estrangement; these are sure signs that underscore this ridiculous hope to which we cling. God makes possibilities out impossibilities, hope out of hopelessness, and the most unlikely of all, peace out of pain.

It would have been good, of course, if Jacob had taught his family how to communicate honestly, to share their problems and to resolve their conflicts. And it would have been a good thing if Joseph was reprimanded for his selfish behavior and if Jacob had treated all his children the same. It would have been good if Joseph’s brothers had expressed their anger using words rather than actions, and worked through the pain instead of using violence. Or, they could have run after the caravan that took him to Egypt. Or told their father the truth and tried to find Joseph. It would have been good, of course, if Joseph was able to work through his grief and go back home; if, upon seeing his brothers he immediately reconciled with them rather than throwing them in prison and framing them for a crime.

Remember last week, I suggested that God was nowhere to be found in the story of Joseph being sold by his brothers into slavery. This is because when we are so busy looking at ourselves, we are too busy to be looking to God. Joseph and his brothers were too busy looking at everything that was wrong with their life and situations. Yet God took this act of betrayal, this act of arrogance and turned everything around so that healing was possible, restoration was able to be had, and reunited this family to create a great nation. If we look closely, I mean really, really, closely; we will see that God was there in the midst of these situations all the while, making good out of our own wrongs. And if we look really closely to the hurts and wrongs in our lives, and connect the dots; we will find the same God of Jacob, the God of Joseph, the God of you and me; working in the hidden places in order to provide us opportunities. Opportunities for forgiveness; opportunities for healing; opportunities for restoration, and opportunities for each of us to draw closer to our Lord and Savior.