

Sermon, Nobleton United. September 17, 2017**Author: Carol-Ann Chapman****Genesis 50:15-21**

It's quite possible that you have heard the Bible story of Joseph. Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat was a very popular Theatre production based on the story. In 2000, Joseph, King of Dreams, a full length animated feature film was released, and Joseph was also once a popular Sunday School story...but in case you are not familiar, here is a little background.

Joseph from Canaan was the youngest child of Jacob. As the youngest...the baby...Joseph became very special to Jacob and because of this, Jacob made a very special, robe for Joseph. Joseph's eleven brothers became very jealous of the relationship and special treatment that Jacob gave to Joseph. Joseph also had prophetic dreams that made the brothers think that Joseph thought he was better than them which made them dislike him even more. The animosity turned to hate and the brothers finally devised a plan to get rid of Joseph. The brothers stole Joseph's coat, and sold him into slavery...but things turned around for Joseph, he became an attendant for one of the Pharaoh's officers and eventually became an interpreter of the Pharaoh's dreams and a deeply loved and respected leader in Egypt whose main job was to manage the storehouses of food he was responsible for building up.

Over this time, there was a great famine in Canaan, so Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to ask for help with their food shortage. When they met the person in charge they did not recognize that it was the brother they had sold into slavery. This is just a snippet...but the story concludes with our reading today. When the

brothers realize that this new ruler is their brother Joseph they are terrified that Joseph will be angry and hold a grudge against them...

This past week was the anniversary of perhaps the most horrific attack in North America...the one we call 9-11. On that day there were many who lost their lives...one of those people was David Rice. On September 11, 2001, David Rice called his mother to let her know that one of the twin towers of the World Trade centre had been hit. He wanted to assure her that he was okay. She immediately called his brother Andrew in Toronto to let him know what had happened and confirm that David, working in the neighbouring building was alive and well. Hearing the news, Andrew turned on the television just in time to see the second plane hit the building David was in. David was never heard from him again.

Before 9-11...I think it was rare for most of us in Canada and the U.S. to use the word "terrorist"...but today that is not the case...for the past 16 years...especially to the south...there has been a brewing hatred toward terrorists...those who threaten the freedom of a nation. Immediately following the event, people were angry about what happened...no longer did they feel the safety of a peaceful nation...and that anger continues on into today. For some it is personal because of the loss of a family member or friend...but for many others there seems to be a sense that they have a right to judge and a right to retribution for the loss of others...regardless of the reasons or the anger...the result is distress, frustration, discord and disharmony...a place absent of peace.

Joseph had every reason to be angry... he was taken from the only home he knew...stripped...thrown into a well, only to be pulled out and sold into slavery. He missed out on having a life-long relationship with the father who loved him so

much. Joseph had every reason to want revenge against his brothers who stole the life that could have been his but this is not how he responds...instead he offers to provide food for all of his brothers and their families. Joseph has a choice he can remain angry and take revenge or he can forgive and move on...he can make his blood relatives suffer or he can look at his present circumstances and recognize all of the good that has come out of the horrible treatment he received from his brothers. So instead of vengeance, Joseph professes that God used the struggles of his life to do good in the world. ...knowing that no matter how difficult life had been in the past...God had used him and his circumstances for good. Joseph finds peace in forgiveness and the knowledge that God is ever present in his life.

Following the death of David...Andrew was angry and in great distress. The grief he felt was almost unbearable and he isolated himself from that backlash of the Twin Towers attacks. When he was finally able pick up a newspaper again, he began discovering that many of the responses were based in revenge and his nation's response was to use power to rid the world of evil. There was a part of him that wanted to agree and say "we'll show them." But when he started reading the reports of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, his rational side kicked in and he knew that force and more deaths were not going to help...none of it would bring his brother or the others back. Finding out about the casualties in Afghanistan only made Andrew more upset. He recognized that many of the people losing their lives in the war against terrorism, were just ordinary people like his brother...there was no peace in revenge...there was no reconciliation. And then one day he was contacted by a group called Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation, the mother of the alleged 20th hijacker of the planes that took

down the twin towers...the mother to one of the ones who was likely responsible for the death of his brother had a request. She wanted to meet with some of the families of the victims to ask for their forgiveness.

At first he was afraid...afraid what others would say about him going to meet with the enemy...afraid that the whole experience would be too upsetting...but finally he went with a small group of others who had lost family in the World Trade Centre who agreed to meet Madame Al-Wafi...mother of Zacharias Moussaoui...-alleged 9-11 terrorist who was alive and being held in detention.

The group were brought to a University building. They sat in a hallway waiting to meet a woman who wanted to offer forgiveness for the sins her son. Andrew waited as the woman next to him was called in. He heard her footsteps as she walked down the hall and entered the room. There was a brief silence followed by sobbing. Finally they both came out the room, both mothers with their arms around each other. By this time everyone in the group was crying including Andrew...Madame al-Wafi...mother of a suspected terrorist, reminded him a lot of his own mother, who had cried so much after David died. For the following three hours she told the group how an extremist cell had given her mentally ill son a purpose in life...a purpose that she could never understand. A purpose steeped in anger that had nothing to do with her own religious beliefs. She begged for their forgiveness...and in the end that is all they had to offer her.

After his meeting Andrew stated: *“One day I’d like to meet Zacharias Moussaoui. I’d like to say to him, ‘you can hate me and my brother as much as you like, but I want you to know that I loved your mother and I comforted her when*

she was crying'."¹ That day Andrew found some peace...he refused to allow hate control him and felt the beginnings of reconciliation.

The unwillingness to forgive is something that steals our peace. Both Joseph and Andrew had suffered the effects of hatred...both did not allow the need to have revenge control them...no instead they chose to forgive and begin a path of reconciliation. St. Paul writes in the 8th chapter of Romans, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." All things can work together for the good of God. Even the most horrible of circumstances can be turned around and purposed for good, and we as followers of Christ are called to live lives of forgiveness, love and harmony...it is in these we will find peace.

On October 17, we along with other area churches will be hosting a multi-faith dialogue where a Muslim leader will come in and talk about his faith. Following 9-11 there were many who wanted to the finger of blame at the Muslim community. Unfortunately there are still some who have difficulty separating extremist religion from those who simply have different beliefs than there Christian cousins. We have an opportunity to allow people to ask questions and dispel some myths that have been perpetuated against the Muslim community. This is our opportunity to ask forgiveness for those who have judged and persecuted an entire community because of the extreme beliefs of a few. This is our chance to live in harmony with other believers of God...2 faiths...one God ...living out peace with one another.

¹ <http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/andrew-rice-usa/>

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,

who has come in Jesus,

the Word made flesh,

to reconcile and make new,

who works in us and others

by the Spirit.²

When we refrain from judgment...when we forgive...when we work to understand. God can work for good and we walk in the way of Jesus.

Thanks be to God. Amen

² United Church of Canada, The New Creed. 1968.