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Restoring Our Love for One Another

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First Episcopal District Bible Study

The Year of RESTORATION

Key Verse:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love .”

1 John 4:7-8

Study Passage:

Genesis 45:1-15



THE RECKONING

Recently, there was an article in the Kansas City Star that told of an instance where upon Mahatma Gandhi visited a Christian church on a Sunday morning in Calcutta. When he attempted to go into the sanctuary, he was prevented from doing so by an usher who informed him that the service was exclusively for “high-caste Indians and whites.” It is believed that Gandhi subsequently lost interest in Christianity, declaring, “I’d be a Christian if it were not for the Christians.”¹

A letter for a woman who had been disappointed by her church said that she had avoided public worship for a season. Not ready to join another congregation, she visited various churches off and on. After some time, she found a church home. More accurately, she found a pastor whose sermons she truly enjoyed. Despite the fact that the congregation was not an overwhelmingly friendly church, she joined. When her marriage dissolved, she reported that with the exception of the pastor and his family, no one in the church offered support, compassion and reassurance.

Certainly the experience of Gandhi the woman just mentioned are not unique. Countless persons have experienced “church hurt.” They have been mistreated, abused, neglected, ignored and/or turned away from Christianity by those who are instructed to love. Sadly, many Christians seem to forget that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is rooted and grounded in a love that God has shared to all of humanity, regardless of race, creed, or any other distinction.

1. <https://www.kansascity.com/living/religion/article18756585.html#storylink=cpy>

RECLAMATION

God's love is universal and indiscriminate. Our love will be restored and our church hurt healed once we focus on sharing God's love with others in the same manner we receive it.



RECOVERY

Genesis means beginnings or origin. As the book of beginnings, Genesis sets the stage for the entire Bible and reveals the person and nature of God. Here we find the story of the creation of the world, the creation of man and woman, the introduction of evil, original sin and human being's removal from the garden, the promise to Abraham and Sarah, and Noah and the flood.

Our study passage centers on Joseph, the son of Jacob. Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel, is living in Canaan along with his family, which included his twelve sons. Of the twelve, Jacob favored the younger two, Joseph and Benjamin, who were born to his wife, Rachel, in his old age. Because Joseph was favored by his father, he was hated by his brothers. Joseph's circumstance was made none the better as he dreamed futuristic dreams that showed his family bowing down to him. He also had the ability to interpret dreams. Joseph's "gift" led to his brothers conspiring against him and selling him into slavery, which almost led to his demise. The full account of Joseph's life can be found in chapters thirty-seven to fifty.

Our passage picks up Joseph's story in chapter forty-five, after Joseph overcame many hardships and is now a leading official in the Egyptian government. There is a famine in the land, and for the first time in many years, he sees his brothers. Despite mistreatment at the hand of his brothers, Joseph allowed his love for them to surpass their wrong doing. Joseph extended unconditional love that exceeded the suffering and pain he endured. This example of love reminds of us of the love that God has extended to us. Scripture reminds of that while we were yet sinners, God sent Jesus to redeem us.

As humans, the natural response in the flesh would be to retaliate when one is offended, but Joseph chose to abide in love. When we abide in love, it facilitates an atmosphere of repentance and a second chance. Once Joseph's brothers discovered who he was, they were fearful that he would expose them to their father. Therefore, out of fear they once again began to plot how they would continue to cover up their wrong doings. Fear was the underpinning of their continued plot. When one operates out of fear, it can diminish the absence of love, which could ultimately lead to further destruction. Thus the brothers contrived another story to perpetuate the first lie. To be restored, one must be willing to acknowledge their wrong and turn away from their it and repent. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us from all unrighteousness."

Genesis 45:1-15 (NIV)

¹ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸ “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

¹² “You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.



AP Photo/David Goldman

RECONSTRUCTION

1. In v.1-3, Joseph revealed his identity. What are the conditions in your life where you choose to conceal or reveal your true identity?
2. Joseph saw the hand of God in the course of action that he endured. How good are you at discerning the positive in the middle of your pain, so as to bring restoration to someone who has wronged you?
3. Joseph could have ordered his brothers to be executed for their actions against him. Yet, from all indications, Joseph’s brothers were never punished. Do you think they should have been? Why or why not?
4. Joseph suffered greatly because of the actions of his brothers, yet he did not use their evil treatment as an opportunity for revenge. How have you demonstrated the degree to which you are willing to love or not?
5. Clearly, Joseph loved his brothers. Not only did he forgive them, v.15 says he kissed his brothers and wept on them. How long does it take you to show love to those who have wronged you, if you choose to do so at all?
6. What other lessons are there in the study passage that can lead to the restoration of our relationships with one another?

RENEWAL

In his book, *Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For*¹, Jerry Sittser shares the story of when his daughter almost died.

While swimming in deep water in Quito, Ecuador she was hit by a speedboat. Two Ecuadorian citizens rushed out to her and were able to get her to shore. There she received crude medical attention which saved her life, until she was able to get to an actual hospital. While in the hospital, people sent her letters, emails, flowers and gifts. Though complete strangers, they treated her like a dear friend and showered her with attention and affection. She was walking again in two days, was released from the hospital in five days, and went back to work a week later.

What a wonderful example of the love of Christ in action. Strangers coming to the rescue and pouring love on someone they didn't know demonstrates the unconditional and undeserving love that Christ desires for us to share with one another. In his book, Sittser says that God "calls the church to become a community of mutual love in the world so that people will see and experience not only the love that believers have with one another but also the love that God has within Himself." To accomplish this goal, Sittser suggests that the New Testament invites Christians to:

- Welcome one another
- Be subject to one another
- Forbear one another
- Forgive one another
- Confess sin to and pray for one another
- Serve one another
- Encourage one another
- Comfort one another
- Bear one another's burdens
- Stir up one another
- Admonish one another

REVIVAL

1. Both the key verse and the study passage compel us to be more loving to one another. Because God is love and because Joseph could love and forgive his brothers, we then should be willing to do the same. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 provides a checklist for the God kind of love that was also exemplified in Joseph. How does your love compare to God's love?

GOD'S LOVE	YOUR LOVE		
	GOOD	IN PROGRESS	NEEDS HELP
Love is patient.			
Love is kind.			
Love does not envy.			
Love does not boast.			
Love is not arrogant.			
Love is not rude.			
Love does not insist on its own way.			
Love is not irritable.			
Love is not resentful.			
Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing.			
Love rejoices with the truth.			
Love bears all things.			
Love believes all things.			
Love hopes all things.			
Love endures all things.			
Love never ends.			

2. In what areas do you need to improve to love others the way God loves us?
3. What are you willing to do today to share the love of God and grow in your ability to love?