

## Bible Tuesday for Epiphany 7, 2019

Genesis 45:3-15

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.

This is the climax of the story of Joseph and his brothers. Reading the whole story is well worth your time. Joseph was the spoil brat, favored son of his father. His 10 older brothers were jealous of him and resented their father's special treatment of him. Joseph spent years in slavery and in prison due to his brothers' wicked jealousy. Yet, when he is finally reunited with them, see what happens! Joseph holds no bitterness or resentment against his brothers but rather sees God's hand in their sale of him into slavery which landed him in Egypt to do God's will. In this text, Joseph's little brother, Benjamin, seems to get special attention. Joseph and Benjamin are both sons of the same mother and father, whereas Joseph shares only his father with his other brothers.

When Joseph was still just a boy, he had a couple dreams which made it clear he expected to be boss of his brothers. They responded with resentment, "Do you mean to rule over us?!!!" In the above passage, it is clear that Joseph does now rule over his brothers. The whole land is suffering draught induced famine and Joseph is in charge of the vast stores of Egypt which he now sells to his brothers. They come begging and he is "Father to Pharaoh."

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

Do not fret because of the wicked;  
do not be envious of wrongdoers,  
2 for they will soon fade like the grass,  
and wither like the green herb.  
3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;  
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.  
4 Take delight in the Lord,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.  
5 Commit your way to the Lord;  
trust in him, and he will act.  
6 He will make your vindication shine like the light,  
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.  
7 Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
over those who carry out evil devices.  
8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.  
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.  
9 For the wicked shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.  
10 Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;  
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.  
11 But the meek shall inherit the land,  
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.  
The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;  
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.  
40 The Lord helps them and rescues them;  
he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,  
because they take refuge in him.

A common refrain in the Hebrew Scriptures is that if the Israelites are faithful to God, they will be secure in the Promised Land, Canaan/Israel. When Assyria defeats the Northern Kingdom and Babylonia defeats the Southern Kingdom, prophets proclaim that this is because the people have been horribly unfaithful to God. This psalm repeats that refrain with a unique twist.

The psalm opens with an admonishment to ignore wrong doers and wicked people. Do not be confused by the seeming success of those who cheat and lie and steal. Do not spend time and energy on vengeance. The wicked and their deeds wither but those who abide in God thrive. Punishment and vengeance are God's business, not ours.

1 Corinthians 15:35-50

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup> Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>42</sup> So it is with the resurrection

of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is <sup>[a]</sup>from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will <sup>[b]</sup>also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, <sup>[c]</sup>is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

I so appreciate this text because it suggests questions that early Christians were asking of Paul. They are the same questions I get asked now.

“When we get to heaven, will we have our bodies?”

“For those of us who are old when we die, how old will we be in heaven?”

“How are we resurrected? Do we get resurrected at some future time? Does God open all the graves at the same moment? If so, what happens if you are cremated?”

There is no New Testament for Paul to consult as he works to answer these questions. Paul only has word of mouth testimony from those who actually met Jesus. So, to answer these questions, he draws on the Hebrew Scriptures, tradition, and his developing theology of who Jesus is and how the Faith works.

Remember that Paul is a Pharisee and that Pharisees are one of the political parties that make up the ruling council of the Jewish faith. The other party is the Sadducee Party. They do not believe in the resurrection. The disagreements between Sadducees and Pharisees were quite strident at times. Some of that animosity is apparent in Paul’s writing when shouts “Fool!”

In this case, what is “sown” is the dead body sown into the ground. In the second verse of the pericope, the metaphor morphs into a seed of grain. Just as the grain stops being a grain but becomes a plant, so Paul teaches that the dead body will be completely transformed in resurrection.

Paul seems to be answering the very pragmatic question with a dualistic answer, far more Hellenist than traditional Jewish. Paul believes that the flesh and blood body is not resurrected but a spiritual body is. He doesn’t elaborate. How can he? Neither Hebrew Scriptures nor Jesus give much information on this other than it will come to pass. Yet, when Jesus was resurrected on Easter, the gospel writers go to lengths to show that Jesus was flesh and blood as well as somehow different. His crucifixion scars were visible. He ate breakfast. He touched and was touched by people. And, Jesus didn’t need to open doors before just showing up in the upper room.

Luke 6:27-38

27 "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 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. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.<sup>[a]</sup> Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Here is our second week of the Sermon on the Plain. Last week Jesus continued the topsy-turvy theme laid out by his mother in the Magnificat and Zechariah in his hymn at John's birth, blessed by God are those ignored or shunned by humans. In this week's sermon section, Jesus gives behavioral guidelines, very challenging ones at that!

Remember that for Jesus and Jews of his day, love is not a feeling, it is conscious action. Jesus is not suggesting that we manufacture some kind of warm, fuzzy feeling about the backstabbers, the gossipers, the liars, the manipulators in our lives. No. Jesus is telling you to act with them as he acts toward us, with compassion, equity, grace, and mercy.

Verse 29 gives several instances of acts of shame turned into acts of voluntary giving. Someone backhand slapping the left side of your face was an act meant to inflict great humiliation and shame. By turning the other cheek, you are asking that you be treated as a peer, right hand to right cheek. If someone robs you of your coat, you turn this into an act of giving by offering more than just the coat, your shirt as well.

Give to anyone who begs from you – in an age when there was no social service, no safety net, those in need had no recourse but to wear out their welcome with friends and relatives and then descend to begging. If we are all on an equal plain, then those in need should be able to merely ask those in plenty to share. Jesus rejects any qualifications for the giving: How great is your need? Can you pay me back? Are you just going to go get drunk with the money I give you? Why don't you just stay in your own country instead of burdening ours? "Give to *anyone* who begs from you!"

Verse 35 and following are summed up in the Lord's Prayer petition, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." This petition does not mean that God only forgives us

to the measure we forgive others. If that were so, "O Lord, who could stand?!" Even so, we are called to show the kind of grace and mercy to all that God does in fact show us in Jesus. "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." In this respect, we can truly say we humans never know what we are doing. How can we truly see the full scope of ramifications of our actions, not only to the people immediately around us, but to their spouses and children, and the planet, etc? What chains of evil we can unleash with one slight, one injustice. Jesus insists that we act as we want others to act, always remembering that Jesus blazed this trail for us, clear and wide. This is not a matter of works righteousness or giving so that you can get. (Lend with no expectation of return.) Our actions are to ever strive to imitate Jesus.