

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Forgiveness: Closing the Loop

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 50:15-21 (NRSVUE)

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Bible/Sermon Focus

I appreciate the title *Holy Ghost* for the third person of the Trinity. Because when we talk about ghosts we can talk about *haunting*. Haunting is a concept that has a lot of potential when considered through the lens of philosophical phenomenology. Phenomenology comes from the Greek word *phainómenon*, meaning "that which appears." The study of phenomenology is in simple terms the study of conscious experience.

People who report to live in haunted homes and have claimed to had an encounter with a ghost have no physical evidence of the sort. The ghost might not be real. But, their *experience* of the ghost is real. They may even have physiological symptoms (sweating, hair raised on the back of their neck, a sudden drop in temperature sensation), proving that their experience is real, but it does not prove the specter is real.

This term haunting can be applied to other areas of our existence and experience. We can find our own selves to be a haunted people. Perhaps not by ghosts but by our mistakes, by things we've done or had done to us. We may wake in the middle of the night, startled by a past trauma we thought we were long since over. And when it comes to forgiveness, sometimes even when we believe we had worked through the reconciliation process, we find ourselves haunted by the same specter, the same ghost back to haunt us again.

That's what happened in our scripture for today. Joseph and his brothers had already reconciled in chapter 45. They wept. They held each other. Joseph told them,

"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here but God..."

He doesn't even blame them. Joseph has his entire family moved from Canaan to Egypt, onto really quality land. His father Jacob (from our story last week), all of his brothers, everyone. And then a few chapters later Jacob dies. They were afraid that Joseph still held a grudge for what they did, and now that their dad had died they were worried Joseph would "pay them back in full for all the wrong [they] did to him."

This is interesting. Joseph is over what his brothers did to him. *He* has found freedom in forgiveness. *His brothers*, have not forgiven themselves. They are *haunted* by their past. Forgiveness is sometimes sticky and not as straight forward as we wish. Even though Joseph was the one to whom harm was done, it is his brothers who are not free. It is his brothers who are haunted. It's as if they have not moved through the steps of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. And that is so dangerous. Cole Arthur Riley writes,

"Call it archaic, but I think confession is liberation. It is easy to think that in injustice only the oppressed have their freedom to gain. In truth, the liberation of the oppressor is also at stake. Whether it's the privilege we've inherited or space we've stolen, what began as guilt will mutate into shame, which is much more sinister and decidedly heavier on the soul. It doesn't just weigh on the heart; it slithers into the gap of every joint, making everything swollen and tender. We learn to walk differently in order to carry the shame, but then we become prone to manipulate things like nearness and connection just to relieve our own swelling.

When wounders, finally becoming exhausted of their dominion, dismantle their delusion of heroism or victimhood and begin to tell the truth of their offense, a sacred rest becomes available to them. You are no longer fighting to suspend the delusion of self. You can just lie down and be in your own flawed skin. And as you rest, the conscience you were born with slowly begins to regenerate, and your mobility changes. You walk past the shattered porch light without your nose to the ground. You can look your father in the eyes. You realize there are other ways to move in the world. It's not only relief, it's freedom.

Truth-telling is critical to repair."

On the one hand we have Joseph who has not only reconciled with the past, he is even able to witness how God wastes nothing. That for all he has been through, God has used all of it for the sake of saving people and making things better. On the other hand we have Joseph's brothers who have sat with their guilt for decades and are still not over it. Repair has not yet come for them.

This week Pastor Jim helped walk us through steps that we can take to "close the loop," to work towards repair of relationship. We can take responsibility for the harm we've caused or make healthy moves when someone has harmed us. When we harm someone we can do the following things: understand the harm we've caused, apologize to the person we harmed, ask for forgiveness from the person we've harmed, and offer steps toward reconciliation. When someone has harmed us we can do the following things: name the harm we've experienced, forgive them, and consider reconciliation.

Forgiveness is not easy, but it is necessary for healing. We can make space for the Holy Ghost to come in and do her healing work. And until we make that space, she will hover and haunt.

And though God doesn't cause the harm we experience, she will assist in the reconciliation, repair, and redemption of that harm.

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about a time when you have felt haunted. How have you found peace?
2. Reflect on the following quote from Cole Arthur Riley, *"Call it archaic, but I think confession is liberation. It is easy to think that in injustice only the oppressed have their freedom to gain. In truth, the liberation of the oppressor is also at stake."*
3. What are the different images and ideas that come to mind when you consider different titles for the third person of the Trinity? (Spirit, Ghost, paraclete, helper, sustainer, etc.)
4. What have been your "takeaways" in this sermon series?

Prayer

God of Forgiveness, we pray for repair to enter into our lives and into the lives of those we have harmed. We pray for a full and complete healing of relationship where there is brokenness between us. We thank you for reconciliation. Remind us that our liberation is tied to one another. **Amen.**

"When wounders, finally becoming exhausted of their dominion, dismantle their delusion of heroism or victimhood and begin to tell the truth of their offense, a sacred rest becomes available to them.." - Cole Arthur Riley