

Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Genesis 25: 21-35

Genesis 33: 1-11

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2 Corinthians 5:14-21

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Genesis 25: 21-35

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger."

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Genesis 33: 1-11

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.” But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.” So he urged him, and he took it.

It was a bitter feud between two people who had once been in love, who had once shared dreams, had planned to marry and have a family, but instead life circumstances and challenges had led him to a spiral of ever increasing poor choices and dangerous habits. In order to be safe from someone she had once loved, she left the home and the relationship with the help of family members while he was not there. He tried to contact her, beg her, cajole her, but after grieving the shattered expectations she was ready to move on. A few years later the death of a beloved mutual friend brought them back together. What began as a tense yet civil encounter with respect to why they were in the same room became a slow, tender, months long path to reconciliation, to making amends, to healing. They could not reclaim all that they had lost, too much had happened then and since, but they could talk openly, honestly, each able to admit their faults and weaknesses, each able to forgive and be forgiven. The feud was becoming a friendship again, good old memories and in-jokes were laughed at and enjoyed once again. Plans to visit were made through a series of text messages back and forth one evening. As it got later into the night, she sent a text asking a question and fell asleep before she received an answer. The next morning, the next day, and then days after, there was never a reply. Thinking that perhaps he had changed his mind, she tried to let it go, and had some regrets about what it might have been, and what it was. A few weeks passed, and she received shocking news. The night that they had been texting and planning, he too had fallen asleep, and he had passed away in his sleep. The autopsy would later say that he died from pneumonia, an odd cause of death for a man in his mid-30's.

This experience does not have a Hallmark movie, happily-ever-after ending, but real life rarely does. What is true, what is real and realistic, is that love turned to bitterness could be and was reconciled. There was peace and forgiveness for each of them. One was able to find that peace and reconciliation in the last months, and even hours, of his life. The other was able to live with the peace of a completed reconciliation between them rather than a guilty sense of wishing there had been reconciliation.

Reconciliation literally means ‘friendship again.’ It is the restoration of friendly feelings. It is action and intention that makes views compatible with one another. And it is a great starting point for our Lenten sermon series that will remind us again and again that God always gives us

second chances. A central message in Jesus' ministry was that all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, could be reconciled, could be restored to a good and right relationship with God. 2 Corinthians 5:18 says it this way, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Jesus' life and ministry, his death and resurrection, were to reconcile the estranged and broken world and peoples back to God. Through Jesus we have been redeemed and reconciled by grace and forgiveness, and so much so that even death itself does not end this relationship between humanity and God.

Esau and Jacob, twin brothers whose animosity began in the womb as the story tells us they competed to be the first born. The sibling rivalry continued as each parent had a favored child. Isaac loved Esau, the one who was born first and loved to hunt. Rebekah's heart was for Jacob, the quiet homebody.

One day Esau came home famished from a day of labor in the fields, and Jacob offered him a bowl of lentil stew in exchange for his birthright.

That's a spot we've all been in, coming in from a long hard day, famished, and while we might not have a birthright to give away we do have the old cliché about giving our eye teeth for something to eat. It's an expression, not a literal binding commitment for us. Yet for Jacob it was. He was not successful in being the first born so he found a scheme instead to claim the birthright. With his mother's help, Isaac was deceived, Esau was duped, and Jacob received the blessing, but also rightly the wrath of his furious brother and so needed to flee. He had gained financially but lost in so many important ways. He was forced to work for his uncle Laban, who in another story for another time, exploited and duped him.

Two decades pass, and the brothers have no contact until God calls Jacob back to his own people. Two decades that Esau has waited for revenge, and it is now time finally for the showdown, or at least that is what a fearful Jacob is expecting as he sends ambassadors and gifts to his brother, and as he divides his family into two camps in case one is captured. Esau approaches from a distance with an army of 400, his moment for retribution is finally here, but it instead becomes a moment for reconciliation.

Jacob has become a changed man, he is seeking peace, unity, restoration. He has had an encounter with God and know that he cannot be reconciled to God without being reconciled to others. And he knows that this will need to be an intentional, humbling act. In time Jesus will teach this lesson, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5:23-24)

In humility, with vulnerability, with remorse, Jacob approaches Esau and finds the reconciliation, the forgiveness that he sought. There were critical, important steps that the twins each had to offer one other for reconciliation. Jacob had to be contrite. Esau had to be willing to forgive. One had to make an overture, the other had to be accepting, in order for reconciliation to happen.

Erik Klobell, in *'The God of Second Chances,'* says, "I have mixed feelings about Jacob...On the one hand, he is a poster boy for dishonest behavior and its consequences; on the others, in his moment of awareness, when he came face-to-face with himself and all that he had done, he made his amends. This is why he is an important proxy for all of us, because he embodies both the supreme weakness and the unique strength of human character-the capacity for sin and the ability to atone."

As we begin our Lenten journey towards resurrection, towards Jesus reconciling the world to himself, not counting our trespasses, our debts, against us, and entrusting the message

of reconciliation to us, who are the people, what are the situations, that call us to reconciliation? What must be reconciled with others so that we may be reconciled with God? Where have we, like Jacob with both the supreme weakness and the unique strength of human character wandered away from where God created us to be? The God of second chances beckons us when love turns to bitterness, when envy turns to fraud, to know that peace, forgiveness and reconciliation can be possible. Amen.