

## “A Time to Heal”

Genesis 45:1-15; *Psalm 133*; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28

Ten days ago, Kay and I started a 1,500 mile trip visiting parishioners in the states of Mississippi and Alabama. Our good friends Jimmy and Bruce Crook send their love and best wishes from Ocean Springs, MS. Three and a half hours north via Hwy 49, Steve Sooy and Pam Reeves exchanged wedding vows at the Madison UMC in a suburb of Jackson, MS. Four hours east via interstate, several rest stops and the University of AL in Tuscaloosa, Kay and I made an overnight stop in Birmingham where we enjoyed an evening meal with Knox Fuqua.

The Saturday night layover was in a Holiday Inn Express undergoing a face-lift. On the way to our room, Kay and I were joined in the elevator by a burly giant of a man with a long “salt and pepper” beard. He explained that he was a member of the construction crew painting newly remodeled rooms in the hotel. He had just returned from a nearby bar and was on his to finish rolling paint. I quickly noticed that my neighbor was proudly wearing a crimson-colored ball cap with a big letter “A” on the front with bold white letters on the side that read, “Roll Tide!”

In contrast to his work attire, I was dressed in my customary coat and tie. Bantering back and forth in light conversation, I couldn't restrain myself. Focused on his slightly coked ball cap, I asked, “You aren't a Gator fan?” I was given a stern look. I risked a second question, “You know what the Good Book says, don't you?” Looking a little befuddled by the question, my neighbor asked somewhat politely (only because Kay was there), “What does the Good Book say?” As Kay took two steps back and peered down at the floor I answered, “The Good Book says if you aren't a Gator, you're Gator bait.” My friend's countenance suddenly straightened as the muscles in his jaw tightened. All of a sudden, the thought occurred to me that perhaps I could have started the conversation by raising a different subject. Just as my Alabama neighbor began to speak, the elevator beeped and the doors opened to the third floor, which was his exit. Flustered and agitated, he glanced at Kay, then me and said, “Y'all have a blessed night.” Remembering that the Clemson Tigers had defeated Alabama in January for the National Championship, Kay chuckled as the doors to the elevator closed, “For your sake,” she said, “I'm glad you didn't say you were a Clemson fan. You might not have enjoyed a blessed night.”

On a more serious note, Kay and I were very much aware of the tragic events earlier in the day in Charlottesville, VA. In addition to the political rhetoric over North Korea, I mentioned to Kay that I felt like we were re-living some of the tensions of the 1960's. Here we are in August of 2017, 70 years after WWII and 40 years after the Civil Rights movement and we are talking about the resurgence of white supremacists, the KKK and Neo-Nazi's. A survivor of the Holocaust living in Florida said four days ago that she could not believe what happened in Virginia. It made her afraid as she remembered Kristallnacht and the concentration camps and she raises a very interesting question, “How can this happen in the United States?” Another Holocaust survivor living in Buffalo, NY (Sonia K.) warns that the biggest mistake that was made during the Holocaust was that people did not speak up. Silence is a sign of approval.

This morning, we ask, “What might the Scripture say to us about these turbulent times?” In response to this question, I would like for us to give attention to the story of Joseph. His brothers suffered from insane jealousy. They resented the special attention given to Joseph by their father Jacob, a situation that exists in many households today. So, the brothers conjure up a plan that will enable them to do away with their brother without blood on their hands. Joseph is thrown into a pit. His chances for survival were not good. Years later when his brothers seek refuge and assistance in Egypt because of famine and drought, they discover that Joseph is not only alive but has found favor with the Pharaoh.

Joseph, too, lived in a turbulent time. We may wonder if the human population has ever enjoyed a period of history that has not been turbulent. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Rev. Dr. George MacLeod referred to the island of Iona, Scotland as a “thin place,” where only tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual. There is also, I believe, a “thin place” in the human spirit. There are days when a thin layer of tissue paper separates belief from unbelief, separates what is good in us from that which can be very dark, a thin layer of tissue paper that separates the will to speak out, to resist evil and intervene when we see something wrong in order to help make it right from the sins of distorted pride, self-righteousness and the voice that tempts us to remain silent, sins that always lie just beneath the surface, ready to compromise a Christ-like way of thinking and acting, leading us to places that can be terribly destructive.

Think what Joseph could have done. Think what most of people would have done in his place. Joseph could have so easily turned his back on his brothers and ignored their plight. Why say anything about the past? Simply, act out of your own self-interest. Keep the secret and eliminate the problem. But this is exactly what Joseph did not do. Why? . . . . .

In times that were unbelievably tough and in times that were now good, Joseph held in his heart the faith of his father, Jacob. Jacob’s life had not always been smooth and easy, but he was always aware of God’s presence, God’s protection, God’s love, and God’s mysterious work that takes place in all of us. So, Joseph says to those gathered around him, “I am your brother.” He comforts and assures them. Everything is going to be all right. Joseph reassures his brothers that God has used him to preserve them, their father Jacob, their family, and their future. Instead of raising, forgive the term, all sorts of hell, Joseph offers a kiss of peace and he weeps with his brothers. It was a time for reconciliation, for peace and healing.

Through the years, I have often counseled family and friends to never allow another person or group of people to turn you into someone or something that you are not. The gospel tells us that Jesus said to a woman who asked for mercy and healing for a daughter, “You have great faith!” And her daughter was healed, which leads me to say, we cannot give in to the power of evil or its influence. Nor can we allow the evil that comes our way to turn us into someone or something we are not. In the name of Jesus Christ, like our brother, Joseph, may we hold in our hearts the faith that has been handed down to us. In the wake of events like those in Virginia and Barcelona, which are not as far away as we may think, our faith calls us to “stand against, speak against, and work against” every form of bigotry and prejudice that brings harm to our neighbor. This is a time that calls for the work of God’s work of justice and peace, and with God’s help, this will also be a time for healing. Lord Jesus, have mercy on us. Amen.