

Genesis 45:1-11, 15 And They Were Talking
Luke 6:27-38

Several years ago, I was substitute teaching at the high school my sons attended. I was in for the Spanish teacher that day, and it was an interesting and to me delightful experience. Many colleges nowadays have a foreign language requirement for admittance and at a small school like the one in that town, there was only one language taught, and only one teacher, so the schedule was easy; 2 Spanish One classes - mostly freshman - 2 Spanish Two classes, mostly sophomores, 1 each of Spanish Three and Four, juniors and seniors respectively. It *could* have been a study on adolescent social development.

It was also springtime and the adolescent hormones were running high. In the freshman classes, the boys all sat on one side of the room and the girls on the other. When they wanted to talk, they had to shout across the room. My chief aim was to keep the noise down.

The juniors and seniors were more comfortable, and sat in large circles “working together,” indulging in conversation. I am not sure how much Spanish was spoken, but they seemed to be getting along pretty well.

It was the 10th graders that made it interesting. The boys and the girls *were* interspersed around the room, and they *were* socializing, but there was a tension in the air. I listened closely wondering if something

upsetting had happened, only to discover that the main problem involved the boys pestering the girls, about how they looked and thought and the things they said, and the girls getting annoyed with it all. I laughed to myself because, of course, I remembered the 10th grade and how nervous I was around the girls.

For the most part I let it go, but in a couple of cases I had to intervene. One boy was snatching the textbook from a girl’s desk and passing it around the room playing keep-away from her. She was up chasing after it. It was very disruptive. To no avail, I asked him to stop.

I went over to have a talk with her. She said, “why am I in trouble, make *him* stop!” I told her she was not in trouble but I thought she might like to know *why* he was doing it. She said, “I don’t care why he is doing it I just want him to stop.” I asked her if she wasn’t interested in why a 16-year-old boy would mercilessly tease a 16-year-old girl? She said, “okay, why?” I said, “it is because he likes you.”

By the time I got to the word, “like,” the book was back on her desk. Since this conversation had played out rather demonstrably, the whole class heard the interchange. There was an eerie silence in the room. Every one of the girls had been teased in some way by one of the boys. Now they knew why. I just went back to the desk and to the book I had been trying to read, laughing to myself at having named them so accurately.

Some time went by and there arose a quiet murmur as they began to speak again. Perhaps I am over-interpreting it, but it seemed to that the tension was gone. I looked over at the two main culprits and they were talking with each other, smiling, sharing a pleasant conversation. I was as if once the cat that they liked each other was out of the bag they could interact without driving each other crazy.

The Brothers

Joseph and his brothers were also driving each other crazy. Their father played favorites and his favorite son was Joseph, who was also a brat (there is no other way to put it). The other ten were jealous, of course, and when Joseph told them about a dream he had in which they bowed down to him, they had had all they could take and decided to kill him, but were dissuaded by Reuben, and with some help from Judah, sold him into slavery in Egypt instead.

After a series of twists and turns in his life, Joseph managed to rise up to the highest levels of power in Egypt, and when famine came was put in charge of grain distribution. When his brothers showed up to purchase grain, his old dream came true as they bowed down before him in the hopes that he would treat them well. In the trappings of his Egyptian garb, they didn't recognize him as he did them.

He messed around with them a bit, and the scene that has been read in our presence today is the one in which, after having wrestled with his anger towards

them, finally made his true identity known. There were tears as he told them not to worry about the past, that God had redeemed it all to save the family from starvation.

After kissing and weeping, the story says, that his brothers stayed around and talked with him. It was as if once they learned that they loved one another, all the nonsense could end and for the first time maybe, they could just talk, have a pleasant conversation.

Luke

In Luke, it is the Sermon on the Plain that is up for grabs this day, and the main part of the reading is the part where Jesus teaches that we should love our enemies, and gives the Golden Rule. There is a logic to this message that requires of believers a higher standard of moral and ethical conduct than is expected of others. "What credit is it to you if you love those who love you, do good to those who are good to you, lend to those from whom you expect something in return?"

As a matter of fact, this passage in Luke's version of the sermon is packed with familiar yet revolutionary language:

"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you."

"If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also."

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

“Be merciful, just as your father is merciful.”
“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.”
“Forgive and it will be forgiven you.”
“Give . . . and it will be given to you.”
“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Maybe it is too much to say that the reason for what they used to call (in sexist language), “Man’s inhumanity to man” or what we may just speak of in the terms of an oxymoron, “human inhumanity,” is because we all love each other and just don’t know it yet, that we are having an adolescent spat because we are afraid of rejection and don’t yet know how to behave as adults (as if the adults are always getting things right).

But at least we can acknowledge that when we look past the superficialities to the humanity of the people underneath the surface, we discover great riches, find new friends. It is miraculous.

Whenever I think of these discoveries, I almost always think of the major divisions among people; rich and poor, black and white, Christian and Muslim (and any of the rest) and certainly male and female.

I am also aware that these words can be framed in other ways, using them to refer to those we encounter at work, and at play, or even at home, with whom we just don’t get along, like all those brothers in that one tragic family.

I am convinced that we should apply this lesson across the board, to those within our social groups and also those outside them.

Either way, we are confronted with a beautiful image, that of people hanging around talking to one another and listening, being fascinated by one another and realizing how blessed they are to have each other. It is, after all, God’s will for us to be friends and not adversaries.

Now I am not naive about the possibilities here. I am just as aware of the human capacity for sin as anyone, and also of the complexity of the world’s problems. But we are meant for the possibilities associated with God’s ways, which are infinitely higher than ours - to look for and nurture our hearts towards those miracles, and to grasp them when they come our way.

The promise is that the reward is much greater than the sacrifice, pressed down, shaken together, running over. Don’t be surprised if, at certain moments along the way or when it is all over, you find yourself hanging around talking, sharing a friendly conversation . . .

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