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Genesis 45:3-11, 15, Luke 6:27-38

Let's pray together, people of Hope. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh God. Amen.

Love your enemies. Do not judge. Do not condemn. And forgive, again and always the insistence on forgiving.

How is this all hitting you this morning? In the midst of an ongoing pandemic, in the midst of wars and rumors of war, a city marred by racism and injustice, on the top of the brokenness we all carry within us? Are you just a little annoyed at this ideologue? Or do you feel shame at not measuring up to these exacting standards? Have you checked out because it's just a little too much in this year of our Lord 2022?

I have to admit that as I sat with this text through the course of the last week, I felt a little bit of all of that. And still, to engage this passage, to be made uncomfortable, is to engage the counter-cultural life and witness of Jesus and the countercultural, abundant life that we're called into as Jesus followers. So let's begin...

I think we can agree, there are a lot of enemies to love right now, at this moment in time, no matter where you stand. I wonder, if there has ever been a time when lines have been drawn so sharply, and the shouting down of one another such a clear mark of ones righteousness?

What does it even mean to withhold judgement, or to forgive, in this current context? What does this text have to say to the brokenness in our lives, and in our communities? Loving your enemies can't possibly be the solution for *all of this*...

In our lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures today, an ancestral story which Jesus likely knew in his heart and his head, we meet Joseph as he greets his brothers in Egypt. These are the same brothers who sold him into slavery because of their envy and spite. In this passage, we watch Joseph respond to his brothers with not only forgiveness, but with provision for their well being. Which is an amazing thing to behold.

And, when we look back in Genesis a bit, and take in the entirety of the story leading to this moment, we also know that prior to this Joseph wrestled with a strong desire to scare and shame his brothers, the ones who had so maliciously abandoned him. In fact, he *did* scare and shame them. Forgiveness, as theologian Debie Thomas notes, was something Joseph had to arrive at, slowly and painfully. There was no cathartic, "altar call" moment when the hurts of his past slipped off his back and rolled away. There was only life, lived one layered, complicated, and unsentimental moment at a time."

When we take our lives as a whole, and the lives of others as a whole, we see that we are all quite layered and complicated people, making our lives out of hundreds of small decisions that shape each day. Big movements like the one Joseph made don't simply happen overnight, but are time worn and time won movements centered in the grace and love of God. When we consider the enormity of the call to those who had assembled to hear Jesus preach on this day, when we consider the enormity of Jesus' call to us, I think we can only take this call day by day, step by step.

A quick story - when we were learning how to be parents to our first born, my spouse and I were at our wits end. And so we talked to a therapist who specialized in this particular parenting style that we were trying to be consistent at, which we definitely weren't consistent at, and which we were definitely feeling guilty for not being consistent at. She looked at us and said, "the thing about this is that you only have to show up with these tools 30% of the time." 30% of the time?

We could do that. And we did. And we learned to trust ourselves, and so we could do it more. And this kid is growing into such an amazing human being. Are we perfect? No. Is he perfect? No. But are we in a better place than if we never tried at all? Absolutely.

We are such an all or nothing culture, or maybe we're all or nothing creatures, that we think that if we can't do something all of the time, we just mark it off as unattainable. If I could figure out how to love my enemies 30% of the time, to extend empathy and grace towards them, my life would be very different. If I could suspend judgement in lieu of curiosity, or release the bonds of resentment in lieu of compassion, If I could forgive others 30% of the time, my life, and the lives of others, would be quite different. I wonder about you?

The call to love our enemies, or to forgive those we already love, to trust in God's abundance, these are all healing acts – and they're not one and done kinds of affairs. They are practices which require discernment, which take our context into account, which necessitate our hearts, our minds and our spirits' involvement. They are lifelong practices, and they must not preclude lament, or rage, or seeking justice.

Friends in Christ, God understands our humanity, and our brokenness, and is full of grace and mercy and love for me and for you, for us, and for them – whether we're on this journey or not, whether we can summon love, or curiosity, or compassion – or not. And that love, is what makes all of this possible. That love is our starting point, not our destination. That love is what sets us free to experiment with this call, even if it's just 30% of the time.

We are not God after all. Thanks be to God. We are not going to be perfect. Our neighbors are not going to be perfect. Jesus knows this, and still he wants us to try. To taste and see.

- Not because he's trying to punish us in some way.
- And not even because of our call to neighbor love and the common good.
- Jesus also extends this call because it can be a better way to live. it makes for a closer relationship with God, it strengthens the bonds of community, it provides a path for healing, and a more hopeful future for you, for me, and for all of us.

So go now. Trust in the promise of Christ's love for you. Trust in the power of healing and forgiveness, rooted in God's justice and love. Live in this promise. Live in this love. May it be so. Amen.