Genesis 45: 3-11 and Luke 6: 27-38. Love within consequences

Begin with Joseph, so let us backtrack a little to the history.

Brothers were jealous of Joseph; he was the favourite and their father, Jacob, spoiled him. He was given the best of everything, given easy jobs, and the final straw was the coat of many colours! That was bad enough to see, but Joseph kept flaunting it in front of them all!

Then Joseph began telling them about dreams he was having, with stars and wheatsheaves bowing before another one greater than them and interpreting it that they would all bow before him.

Not just Jacob’s favourite, but God’s too. And not even in the expected tradition with the eldest brother having the power, but the younger one! Well, that seems to run in the family (look at when Jacob cheated his elder brother Esau out of his inheritance).

Rather than complaining to, or seeking God, or showing Joseph patience and kindness, all 11 of the brothers chose to allow jealousy to overcome them. Jealousy turned into resentment and eventually hatred. This is all about choice.

As soon as an opportunity arose the brothers planned to kill Joseph. Thankfully Reuben attempted to rescue him – rather than shed blood throw him in a cistern. The cistern they chose was actually empty – it should have had water in it. Did Reuben know that? Was he trying to rescue Joseph, or just choose another way that left them with some wriggle room to not feel as guilty? I do not know the answer.

Some Egyptians were passing at the time, so the brothers decided to sell Joseph into slavery instead. Again, was this to save Joseph or just so they could make some profit?

While in Egypt Joseph was living in the consequences of past actions as a slave. But he continued to be the best that he could be. He could have chosen to do the least that he could while taking time plotting revenge on his brothers. Rather, he chose to work hard, to be diligent, to show fairness and justice within the positions he was in.

It was his honourable characteristics that earned him promotion, but also led him to imprisonment. Even in prison Joseph remained of good character, helping others, being trustworthy and interpreting dreams truthfully. It was through the interpretation of dreams that he was eventually called to Pharoah and able to interpret God speaking and warning of a severe famine that would come. It was because of that warning that Joseph had been able to help plan to have reserves when the famine hit.

Yes, a lot had happened before the passage that we have read. A lot of choices had been made which had led him to the position that he was in.

When Joseph’s brothers came to him, looking for food in the severe drought Joseph had a choice of how to re-act. He could easily have told them to go away – it would have been a death sentence to starvation, but no blame could be attributed to him.

He could have had them punished, imprisoned or taken into slavery. I wonder whether he had ever imagined how he would act if he saw them again?

The choice Joseph took was to show these men, who you could either call his initial oppressors or his brothers, forgiveness; to offer them life in a safe place with plenty of food and a relationship with him. Joseph chose to show them love rather than hate.

Forgiving people does not change the past, and it certainly does not take away the pain caused, but it should mean that we do not want to see people suffer from harm.

Joseph states that “it was God who had sent him ahead of them”. Raises the question, was it God’s intent for Joseph’s brothers to hate?

If the brothers had not taken the action that they had, would God have left everyone to starve in the famine?

What would have happened if Joseph had taken the route of revenge and hatred? The twelve tribes of Israel would not have survived – each son of Jacob was a tribe of Israel.

God has a plan. It will come to fruition because God has ordained it. But we have a choice as to whether we become part of that plan. We are not robots; we have choices that we can make. If we choose to walk with God, then we will know the strength of His presence with us. If we choose to go against His desires, He will still be able to achieve His plan, and He will use all things for His good purposes, even wrong choices – but we fall by the wayside and do not have His presence with us. Do you believe that the brothers continued their life after selling Joseph with no consequences? They would have to live with all that brought without knowing the peace of God in their hearts.

I do not believe that God wants anyone to have hatred for another person, because of what Jesus teaches us. The passage in Luke is just one example of Jesus telling those listening to love their enemies. This follows on from last week, where we read His words for those who are blessed and those for whom He says “woe” – or more accurately “Alas”, people who are compassionately mourned by Jesus. Those words He spoke had already shown the opposite to the earthly view.

Jesus now continues. To show love even to our enemies and oppressors. The original Greek word recorded is “agape” which denotes love not drawn out by merit, but where someone chooses to be a loving person, chooses to give love even though it may not be earned or deserved.

Love is a command, God’s law, and is therefore, in biblical terms, not optional.

Love your enemies – the Israelites listening were living in occupied territory – the Romans were hated. Wasn’t it the done and accepted thing, to call them names? Jesus tells them not only to avoid calling out curses, but to go beyond that and bless them and pray for them.

What about being struck, and the term used would have meant a full on right or left hook to the jaw, not just a little slap. If you receive a punch isn’t it accepted, and usual human-nature to retaliate and protect yourself? Jesus says that is not the way, but rather be ready to receive further injury instead of succumbing to violence and feelings of hatred.

You do not always have to present your chin again physically, but it is an attitude of the heart and a choice that must be made.

Showing non-retaliation and love is more infuriating for the abuser – there is no justification provided for their actions. Our attitudes can have a positive impact on people watching – but the main reason is that we do not submit to the evil nature of hatred.

Jesus then moves on to state that His followers should lend to anyone and everyone, regardless of whether they can afford to repay them. Again, I do not think we should take this literally – Jesus was not and does not promote a nation of saintly paupers and prosperous idlers. But He does want Christians to love all people above possessions.

Losing possessions and “stuff” is not what should decide our charitable giving. Jesus uses the word “give” in a continuous tense – not just a one off gesture.

It is having a loving attitude to everyone that sets us apart as followers of Jesus.

Jesus then confronts us about judgement. Do not be judgmental. Now, this does not mean that as a Christian we do not, or should not, determine between right and wrong. It does not mean either that justice should not be sought – the law is there for all.

But we should not condemn anyone as beyond help or redemption, and we should seek justice and not revenge.

Jesus is commanding us to be like Joseph, to make choices that enable us to be the best person we can be, and encourage others, so that we can reach our full Spiritual potential – despite consequences of past actions we may be living within.

We have choices to make every day to show love whenever possible. And this attitude of love to everyone, whether deserved or not, is the exact attitude of love that God has for each of us.

You are loved!

Prayer into communion