

Reconciliation Service in the Season of Lent 2020
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(Reading: Genesis 45:1-8)

It was late June of 1972. My parents had decided to stop at the local A&P Grocery store to pick up some milk. My brother and I wanted to get home soon to watch something on TV, but my parents told us to get out of the car and come into the store with them.

And when we got in to the store – it was *mayhem*. People arguing over a gallon of milk. People yelling at store employees because there was no coffee. Empty shelves. Angry people.

My brother and I were dumbfounded. “What is going on?” my brother asked. And my mom said, “Boys, this is what panic looks like.”

When we got back into the car, our parents tried their best to explain. A large storm named Hurricane Agnes was coming toward Pennsylvania. People were worried that there would be flooding. In their fear, they ran to the stores to buy whatever they could find. Fear does that. “This is what panic looks like.”

(Does this ring a bell with anybody tonight?)

In our passage from the Book of Genesis, we hear a story which answers two questions. Those questions are:

- + What does *sin* look like?
- + What does *forgiveness* look like?

What does sin look like? In the Book of Genesis, it looks like a group of young men – the sons of the patriarch Jacob. Their youngest brother, Joseph, seemed to be their dad’s favorite. Jacob gave his son Joseph a special gift – you’ve heard of it, or at least heard the musical about it: the famous “coat of many colors.”

What does sin look like? It looks like jealousy. It looks like the brothers of Joseph

who are convinced that if their father loves Joseph so much, then their father must love them less, or not at all.

Sin look like a group of sons who are convinced that their father's love cannot be trusted. They believe that the intimacy between child and parent is fragile. In their anger, they decide to violate the very nature of the family bond. They distrust their dad.

And they want to kill – yes *kill* – their younger brother.

One of them has some remnant of 'Jiminy Cricket' on his shoulder. He says, 'Maybe we shouldn't kill him. So I have an idea. Let's sell Joseph into slavery!'

What does sin look like? It looks like *rationalization*. Doing a bad thing, but convincing yourself that you're actually doing a good thing. "At least we didn't kill him. WE did something nice – we *just* sold him into slavery."

In Genesis, Sin looks like a lack of trust in the love that has been promised to us. Sin looks like jealousy, anger, rationalization, and a violation of the most important relationships.

I know you want to get home and watch more stories about Corona Virus, so let me move quickly through the rest of the story. Joseph is sold into slavery. He ends up in Egypt. Through a series of miracles, he becomes the most important advisor to Pharaoh.

And when the whole world is experiencing a panic due to drought, the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery end up traveling to Egypt to beg for bread and toilet paper.

But as we hear in tonight's reading, when the brother's arrive, they do not recognize that the Egyptian official they are talking to is actually the brother they betrayed.

Just think about that for a moment. Put yourself in Joseph's shoes – or sandals. Right in front of you are the people who have betrayed you most in life. And now you have all the power, and they have nothing.

Joseph could have ordered for them to be arrested, or sent away, or killed. In other words, he could have *gotten even*. He could have taken revenge.

But instead... we see what *forgiveness* looks like.

What does it look like? It looks like Joseph sending all of the Egyptians out of the room so that it is just Joseph and his brothers standing there. And instead of spewing forth venom and a lifetime of anger, he says, "come closer. I am Joseph. Come closer to me."

What does forgiveness look like? It looks like the past being healed, the broken relationship being restored, the intimacy being strengthened. It looks like distance giving way to closeness. It looks like a promise: 'we are not at odds. We are brothers. We are family.'

Joseph's heart is so full at this moment of forgiveness and reconciliation, that his emotions overflow. The Egyptians can hear him crying – tears of joy.

We *know* what *panic* looks like.

We also know what *sin* looks like. In our lives, I am guessing that our sin often resembles the sin of Joseph's brothers. No, we don't sell people into slavery. But don't we give in to mistrust, impatience, jealousy, a lack of trust? Don't we often look like people who do not trust the love that has been promised to us by the God who made us?

And what does forgiveness look like tonight? It looks like Jesus, our brother, saying to each of us, "Come Closer. I am your brother, your friend, your savior. Come closer."

What does forgiveness look like tonight? It looks like you approaching a priest in this sacrament and saying to Jesus, "By my actions, I have put my trust in someone or something else. I have betrayed you. I have broken our relationship." And Jesus says, "Don't panic. Come closer. Be reconciled. You are forgiven."

When I receive this sacrament, I know that it makes me feel good. I feel lighter. I

feel forgiven.

But tonight I suggest that we ponder how this sacrament touches *God's* heart. Like Joseph, doesn't our loving God feel, in the depths of his heart, a great deal of joy whenever he is able to draw one of his beloved children closer to his embrace?

Come forward this night, and encounter the one who says to all of us: "I am Jesus, your brother. Come closer. Come home."

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