

Genesis 45:1-15  
Psalm 133

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32  
Matthew 15: 10-20, 21-28

We continue to look at the story of Jacob's family, particularly of Jacob's favorite son Joseph. Whenever there is a favorite child, there can be trouble, and Jacob's family was no exception. Out of hatred for their brother, they sold Joseph to traders who took him to Egypt. However, through a long chain of events, Joseph ends up being the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Joseph leads a program that delivers the Egyptians from starvation during a seven-year drought. Not only does Joseph save the Egyptians, but he saves his own family by inviting them to join him in Egypt, saving them from starvation back in Canaan.

Joseph declares that his going to Egypt was a part of God's plan. It was God's intention that Joseph go to Egypt to save the Egyptians, to save the nations surrounding Egypt, and to save his own family, from starvation. Joseph was God's servant. As the Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim points out, two important verbs alert us to God's guiding role in these events. Both verbs are declared by Joseph, "God sent me," which he said three times, and "God has made me," which he said two times. Joseph was God's servant in saving who knows how many people in that region of the world. It was God who sent Joseph for God wanted to save not only God's own people Israel, but all those affected by this famine.

God saves the people of the region this through the hands of an immigrant, a foreigner, as noted by one commentator. The commentator asks, As we consider our treatment of both documented and undocumented immigrants in the United States, do we embrace them as Joseph's who have come to America by the grand plan of God to save their families and possibly this American nation? Or have we confronted them as

potential criminals and social pariahs to be subject to tough immigrant identification laws and unmerciful deportation?

Let me say again that Scripture declares that we are to welcome the alien, we are to welcome the strangers. It is an admonition found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is an admonition that is repeated frequently. God told Israel that they are to welcome the aliens because at one time they were aliens in the land of Egypt. One cannot deny that God explicitly asks God's people to welcome the alien and the stranger. This is God's alternative vision for the world.

The role of Christians, the role of the church, yours and my role, is to present this alternative vision for the world and work for it. This is not about Democratic or Republican or Libertarian or Independent. This is not about being conservative, progressive, or middle of the road. Dr. Michael Jenkins, the president of Louisville Seminary, in a statement he wrote about the events in Charlottesville, Virginia, wrote, "What I am about to say is theological in character; therefore it must also be political in nature although it is not partisan." This is not about partisanship. The only thing partisan is that if we are to follow Jesus then we must be on Jesus' side. This is about presenting before our politicians, our governmental leaders, God's vision for the world. Our job is not to tell the politicians how to do it. That is their job. We are not politicians. We are to be prophets, putting before our politicians God's alternative vision. Our job is to present them with God's alternative vision.

Martin Luther King, in his Letter from the Birmingham Jail, wrote: "In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, 'those are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern,'

and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular.”

In being true to the gospel we cannot be silent! To not present our politicians with God’s alternative vision is to hide our candle under a bushel basket. One of the criticisms of the church is the church’s silence. When the state of Arizona supported a controversial new immigration law in 2010, most Christians in Arizona and throughout the United States remained indifferent about what was happening, except a handful of courageous clergy members and laity. Even now when other states and the federal government are considering similar controversial laws, few voices from the church offer alternative visions and resolutions. We keep silent. But the church cannot be silent. To be silent is to be complicit in the injustices of our day. For the church to be silent is to reject our calling as a people of God. To be silent is to reject the resurrection.

Perhaps it is easier to be silent. No-there is no perhaps to it. It is easier to be silent. Is it easy to be a prophetic voice? Absolutely not! Is it a challenge? It certainly is! The prophets in the Old Testament were criticized for being prophetic. They were told to shut up. They were told, “You are not one of us. Go back to where you belong.” They were physical abused. Many pastors are afraid to be prophetic, fearful that people will leave the church, fearful that they will be asked to leave the church.

In a world of injustices, God calls for justice. In a world of hate, God calls for love. In a world of militarism, God calls for peace. Living the Christian life is counter cultural. Living counter cultural is not easy. Jesus declared that if we are not willing to take up the cross, then we are not worthy of him. To take up the cross does not mean that we

are to be crucified, but it does mean that discipleship is not going to be easy; that we must be willing to take risks.

Recently I was told about a pastor who was criticized one Sunday by a church member about what he felt was the pastor's political preaching. The pastor simply responded that he was preaching what Jesus had to say. The church member responded, "Well I have a problem with some of the things Jesus had to say." That is exactly why it is difficult to be a disciple because we may not like what Jesus had to say. Welcome the immigrants. Sell all you have and give to the poor. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek. Pray for your enemies. Love your enemies. Whoever loves father or mother or son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Those, and more, were all said by Jesus. This is about what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that being a prophetic voice creates tension. I am not talking about violent tension but nonviolent tension can be constructive.

Jesus, in the parable of the last judgment, included welcoming the stranger. with feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, housing the homeless. These were issues that concerned Jesus, and are issues that should concern us., should concern the church.