

Genesis 45: 1-8

*Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Send everyone away from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.*

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.'*

Good morning! This is our twelfth Sunday in a row on our journey through the book of Genesis. We've walked alongside Adam and Eve in the creation narrative, Noah, Abraham & Sarah, Lot, Hagar, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

We have one more Sunday after this one to go in this series before Advent begins, but we know that our journey is not done. This book will continue to speak to us and to the millions more who hold these passages as sacred.

So back to our story today, centering on Joseph. To catch you up from the past few weeks, Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son. Despite his young age, he was considered to be the favorite son of Jacob. Because of this and his colorful coat, his jealous brothers sold him into slavery Egypt. After wisely interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, however, he rose to second-in-command in Egypt, and his foresight saved Egypt during a famine.

As Joyce outlined in our Children's Time, reiterated by Rick in the scripture reading, today we're talking about that moment when Joseph reunites with his family. This isn't a typical family reunion, this is a story that involves a bunch of back and forth, and quite a lot of movement.

While the end of any reunion story is kind of sweet, I can't help wondering what it must have felt like to live in the middle of it. A few chapters in Genesis don't give us a great sense of just how much time transpires here.

Scholars estimate that a caravan journey from Canaan to Egypt probably would have taken about a month. (SLIDE) So despite this story covering just a few chapters in Genesis, we're looking at a month's journey when Jacob sent his sons to find grain in Egypt, time spent in Egypt followed by a month to return home, a month to bring back Benjamin, and at least a month more to return to get Jacob. I'm imagining that relocating an entire family and all of their possessions to this land of Goshen would have taken even longer.

This context is hard to wrap our heads around. It is a story of a long amount of time spent in the in-between.

Last Sunday's beautiful service where Sally Minnich and her violin joined Pastor Kate to talk about dissonance has been (pardon the pun) resonating with me all week. Living in that tension before the resolution makes me read these Genesis stories in a new way.

Joseph and his brothers spent many months - really years in Joseph's case - living in limbo, living in the dissonance, none of them knowing how the story would end. Earlier this week, as we prepared for today's service, we noticed that our scripture passage from this morning includes this line - *'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?'* *But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.* So dismayed were they at his presence! What must have been going through their minds, seeing their brother who they had betrayed, not just alive, but thriving in a position of power! Talk about living in dissonance. For years they had been carrying the truth of their misdeeds.

There is pain and chaos in the dissonance of human history. People get hurt and feel hurt in the dissonance, and it's hard to wrap our minds around what or when a better outcome might arrive. When might that dissonance resolve?

This week, amid the news of some... uh, let's just say, questionable presidential cabinet nominees, I've been thinking a lot about that MLK quote, (SLIDE) "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." I want that arc to bend. And most of the time I want it to bend faster. Sometimes I wonder if it's bending the wrong way.

You might have noticed that in this week's midweek newsletter, Doug included a reference to Theodore Parker. (SLIDE) Parker was a Unitarian abolitionist, who gave a sermon about the moral arc of the universe, (SLIDE) to which MLK was referencing. Parker was also living amid dissonance. He saw the ongoing slavery of the 1800s and wanted it to end sooner. In his sermon from 1852, titled *Of Justice and the Conscience*, Parker wrestles with the slow pace of social change. In the sermon's conclusion he talks about the necessity of humans participating in God's justice here on earth, but also laments that the pace is not fast enough. He likens the crawl of justice to small sea creatures building up islands of coral that take thousands of years to take shape. Yet he is convinced that justice is coming, and that we will be the ones to help to usher it in. His 11 page sermon (SLIDE) includes the word "justice" over 100 times.

Big arcs are hard to gauge. Just think about the shape of the earth. (SLIDE) When we look out our window - even if we have a nice view - it still looks relatively flat. Zooming out (SLIDE) starts to provide us with some perspective, but its perspective that most of us will never see with our own eyes - just through photographs and videos taken in space. We must have faith that our horizon is in fact an arc, though we cannot see it. Just as we must have faith that the moral arc of the universe is also bending toward justice, as we live amid the dissonance.

In their book, *Genesis for Normal People*, Jared Byas and Pete Enns highlight this Joseph story because it foreshadows the Exodus account to come later in scripture. They note that Joseph was enslaved, but in this middle, really horrible space of being sold into slavery, accused of adultery, and loathed for simply existing, in *that* awful dissonance space his life is spared, and he is elevated to something greater. It is from this middle space that Joseph is able to offer salvation to his family in their time of need. Overcoming enslavement leading to release and salvation for his family hints at the future enslavement and salvation for the Hebrew people.

And perhaps more importantly, for our context today, Joseph *claims* his role in that pivot, in that movement from dissonance to resolution. He claims God sent him ahead, to preserve their family on this earth. Joseph claims his place to help the arc to bend toward justice. It isn't just God's hand dictating how things

happen, it is Joseph, acting as he feels called, as the hands and feet of God the world, and it's also what Moses will do in the Exodus story.

Just this week, Pastor Kate and I joined some local clergy gathered in the Centre LGBTQ offices to offer their presence and support to our queer community who are feeling more alienated in the wake of a political season with a variety of ads focusing on anti-transgender rhetoric. The room was packed - and not just with clergy from State College, but with pastors from Boalsburg, Bellefonte, and Penns Valley. I couldn't help but think back to my arrival in this community a decade ago, where those of us who were LGBTQ-affirming clergy felt like a very small voice in our area. For our LGBTQ siblings, dissonance is a familiar place to exist, and yet signs of life and affirmation from congregations like ours are becoming more visibly present and felt in our community, as that arc toward a more fuller inclusion longs to bend in the right direction.

Our journey through Genesis has been full of dissonance, and full of people longing and striving for something better despite the difficult situation in which they find themselves. Perhaps that is how we find our way forward when we feel that dissonance. It happens when we claim our role, using our hands and feet to join God's spirit in creating a better world. We see the arc begin to bend toward justice when our actions help to lift up those who are marginalized, or when we offer ourselves beyond what is expected. We notice it when decisions are made for the good of the whole and not just the individual. And we notice it when we zoom out to see that yes, things are indeed changing - painfully slowly at times, occasionally setbacks along the way - but often, on the grand scale for the better.

In that small way, like the sea creatures building an island, we slowly help to bend that moral arc toward justice.

Last week Pastor Kate introduced this refrain as we entered into sharing time. I wanted to offer it again this week, as we move into a time of silence followed again by sharing in each other's lives. So join me in reading this in unison, written by Isaac Villegas, formerly the pastor at Chapel Hill Mennonite Church.

Conclude with VT 1043, followed by

*Some trust in governments and some in borders,*

*But we trust in God,  
who invites all people to live in peace.  
For the earth belongs to God,  
and all creation is in God's care:  
land and waters, plants and animals,  
sky and soil declare the hospitality of God.  
The world belongs to God, and all who live in it.  
We belong to one another as siblings,  
all of us children of God.*

Friends, may we join God's spirit movement, helping to bend that arc toward justice. And may our glimpses video offer some signs of that just universe we long for.

Joel, when you're ready.