

# Sermon for August 14, 2016

*By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Romans 7:14-20, Genesis 42:1-17

## ***“Doing what we ought to do”***

This past Wednesday morning when we gathered around for the vision team meeting we came up with even more ideas for today’s worship especially centered around our Scripture for today. Paul in Romans talks about how undisciplined we are to the point where we know what we ought to do, but we just don’t do it. Joseph, likewise, knew the right thing to do when he sees his brothers, was to greet them, welcome them, and bring them into Egypt with him. But for some reason he wanted to put them to the test.

So we came up with some ideas on how could we get that point across. Have you all choose between a healthy snack and junk food as you came into church this morning. The image of someone training hard to run a marathon in March and then literally not putting on his running shoes since then, now that it is August. In our own interpersonal relationships with husbands and wives, or boyfriends and girlfriends where we know the buttons that we push are going to strike a particular chord, and it is often not a positive one and we say it anyway or we do it anyway. But each of these examples really only affect the individual who is involved, or those directly related to them. The point that we see today in this Scripture is that our actions don’t just affect us individually, or even those who are right next to us.

I think it is so easy for us to forget that every single thing that we do not only affects us but also has an impact on those around us, even people we don’t know or see. Joseph in our Scripture today is someone whose actions have an effect on all of Egypt and the surrounding countries and communities. His actions even have an effect on his family who has given him up for lost and yet they unknowingly have to rely on him for survival.

Today Joseph faces his brothers again, the very same brothers who sold him into slavery and guess what, he hasn’t forgotten and we see that he certainly hasn’t forgiven. Today we get to see a very human side of Joseph, someone who is ruthless, and exploits his position fully. Joseph is prepared to return to his brothers some of the grief that they have caused him.

Paul in Roman's speaks of his sinful actions and we are reminded through his words of Christ's perfect humanity. Jesus was no less human than we are, but he was without sin which is not something that we can say for ourselves or for Joseph. We find in Christ a humanity that needs to touch all of us so that we follow his perfect human examples, as compared to that of Joseph who we find ourselves saying about him, you can't really blame him can you?

It is a fun and exciting time to be a part of First Presbyterian. There has been so much activity and work being done around here. A few weeks ago the youth room was completely redone by Dan Colvin and Brett and Laura. This past week the stage in Fellowship Hall was completely redone by Jeff and Carol McComsey, two of our Sunday School classrooms were completely redone by Bill and Joyce Potter. Outreach had a meeting and Melanie Underhill our nursery worker extraordinaire is starting up a family ministry that is kicking off at the end of September, the food bank is going to have an important meeting on Thursday to discuss the current direction and take inventory of that ministry, Emily Ott began her ministry as a youth worker on staff here, preschool has expanded and added a classroom. It is a time when any one of those decisions, any one of those actions has an impact that goes so far beyond the walls of this church, and often we don't even realize it.

What any one of us, or what any group does here in the church affects the whole church for both good and sometimes, if it is done selfishly and for motives or agendas that aren't for the good of the body, for bad. If we look over or skip a single member and don't utilize their gifts or talents then we may not know what we are missing but you can be assured that the church loses out. If we do something that all along has been seen to be in the wheelhouse of a member of the church and they aren't involved in that decision making, then they can feel slighted and not want to participate any longer. We need to see this church as a connected group of believers with one goal in mind, that is to bring others to God's kingdom here on this earth. When we become disconnected, or connected away from each other then we lose the purpose and the power of the church.

Our Scripture today connects Joseph and his brother back together again after nearly 22 years since Joseph first started his dreaming. Jacob their father tells the brothers to get off their donkeys and to go find food in Egypt. The first thing that happens when they see Joseph, although they don't know he is Joseph, is that they bow down to him. What has just happened? God's prophecy has come true. Joseph's dream has been realized, we could end the story here with the dream coming true but we don't.

Joseph recognizes his brothers and Scripture states that he treats them like strangers. He doesn't need to do that. It is obvious he has the upper hand in this situation so why not just bring the family down and get on with life? Well, I think it is obvious that Joseph has not forgotten what they did to him and he probably can't wait to get back at them for what they did. What an opportunity! It is almost like being invisible. Remember those dreams you used to have when you were younger that you were invisible? You could get away with anything. My favorite part of Tolkien's Hobbit and Lord of the Rings was when you could put on a ring and no one could see you, but it also leads to a corruption of the person as well. Joseph is probably thinking let's have a little fun and let's make them sweat. Invisibility can lead to you doing things that you would regret, that you shouldn't do.

In the course of the conversation the brothers give Joseph a brief biography and they say we are 12 brothers. 10 are gathered here, one is at home and another is no more. Joseph is the brother who they think is no more. How delicious, the no more brother, and if you only knew. Joseph can do whatever he wants to them, he is after all in charge. He ends up paying back to them what he had experienced. Throw them into prison, much like he was thrown into the pit to begin the story and then eventually thrown into the dungeon. It was a fitting end to what Joseph had experienced.

Isn't there a part of you that says, you go Joseph, don't you almost expect Joseph to do this. We probably don't even blame him for it, but... it really isn't the Christian thing to do now is it? It might be the natural, expected thing for him to do, but it really isn't the right thing to do.

You know what we find in the Bible? We find that the good guys of Scripture aren't saints after all, they aren't all sweetness and light, and the "bad guys" aren't really monsters but rather both are human beings shown in all their many, and sometimes contradictory aspects.

In Romans Paul explains to us the contradictory and paradoxical struggles that we all go through. It is hard to understand our actions at times because we are so focused upon what we want. Joseph really wanted revenge in this case. When we focus upon our wants we so often fail to recognize how we are all connected together. Husbands are not only connected to their wives but also to their children, their church, their community. What they do affects a myriad of people. Wives are not only connected to their children but to their husbands and their friends and their country. How they act or don't act affects all of the people around them. The church is not only responsible for its members

but also for its community and those around them. What a church does affects much more than just its individual members.

This is why it is so crucial to see that every action, every decision that we make affects far more than just those whom we think it affects. Which is why Paul agonized over the fact that so often we know what the right thing to do is, but we don't do it, well because we don't do it. Paul blames evil, which is another way of saying that we have no self discipline and we don't ask God to help us as we know he would.

Hearing Joseph's story, a story which I love and unfortunately in this aspect am able to relate to, helps us to recognize that we need help in our lives, in our decisions, in all that we do. Jesus didn't want to die, he didn't want to suffer. But he knew what affect his death would have on history and in the world. He understood how connected we are so that if the sin of one person was able to condemn all of humanity, then his righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, was able to save us and free us from that sin and give us eternal life.

Live your lives as people who are connected to each other, living for each other, and knowing that every action you take doesn't just affect you, but affects those around you, so use Christ as your example of doing the right thing. Amen.