

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

“Doing what we ought to do”

We prayed this week that the focus of this Sunday worship would not be technology but rather Jesus Christ and Him glorified literally across the globe. I pray that this remains true as we look at our Scripture this afternoon. How many of you were affected this week by the volcano erupting in Iceland? I think it has affected more in this community than we realize. This morning I was asked to preach at St. Andrew's because Father Simon was stuck in England due to the eruption and wouldn't be getting back until this evening. It's was amazing to see how one single event is able to influence and affect every single thing around it and events very, very far away from it. Today's worship we have no idea what affect it will have on any of us, especially if we approach it willing to be moved.

Today we are back looking at Joseph. For those of you in Italy who haven't been following Joseph, you need to know that this group has patiently been with Joseph, for quite a few weeks, and with Genesis for quite a few years. 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. 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?

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Over my 17 years of ministry as a pastor I have learned that an action that an individual or community takes has repercussions beyond what anyone could imagine. While in Italy, this over a century old church there has touched peoples' lives in amazing ways. We think of a pastor who on his birthday was asked by his wife to go find something to do because he came home too early and the cake wasn't ready, and when he did eventually come home he arrived with two orphan kids who were selling matches. From that an orphanage was spawned that touched the lives of thousands, upon thousands of people including many in the congregation in Salerno and myself.

We think of here in Moscow of the way in which the medical clinic and the conversation about the apartments has taken shape hasn't been through anything but a series of individual actions none of which are earth shattering or especially brave, but actions nevertheless that have the potential of providing health and safety for literally thousands of people.

Do you know that the same is true of the church, our church. What any one of us, or what any group does here in the church affects the whole church for both good and 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. 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.

This is true in whichever church we find ourselves. When our purposes become other than bringing people to Jesus Christ than that will affect all of us. I remember one Presbytery meeting when we were examining a candidate for ordination and I just knew that something was wrong. So I asked him: Do you believe that Jesus is God? He couldn't agree to that. He was going to become the student chaplain at the University of Florida. I realized then the impact that our action that day would have on thousands of young students attending that University for years to come.

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 haunches 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.

Every night now for the past few weeks Bethany and I have been reading the Hobbit and she always loves the part when he puts on his ring and can do anything and get away with anything because nobody can see him. The same is true here with Joseph with his brothers not recognizing him. Joseph is probably thinking let's have a little fun and lets make them sweat.

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. I've discovered that Saints are people whose past has not been sufficiently examined.

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, and lastly their job. 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. I would also argue society in general. What a church does affects much more than just its individual members. We are our brothers, sisters, community's, nation's, and world's keeper.

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.

At the Friday morning Bible Study, we spoke about our individual and collective lack of discipline and how that reality affects everyone around us and everything we do. Jesus didn't want to die, he didn't want to suffer. But he knew what effect 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 either here in Moscow, or there in Salerno, but affects those around you, so use Christ as your example of doing the right thing. Amen.