# Love and forgiveness are intricately related

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7th Sunday after Epiphany – Gen 45:3-11, 15, Psalm 37: 1-11,40-41, 1 Co 15:35-50, Luke 6:27-38

**INTRODUCTION:**

Today I want us to think about love and forgiveness, 2 very loaded words, but ones that we cannot escape as Christians because they are central to Jesus' teaching and therefore to us as his followers.

I often think about these two themes of love and forgiveness because I so often listen to people talking about how they cannot love someone or forgive them because of something that has happened. And I am struck by the number of families these days where one person, usually a child, won't talk to another, usually the parent. And this goes on for years and years, often without one party, usually the parent, knowing what went wrong.

Fortunately two of our readings today deal with these themes of love and forgiveness, so we will look at Luke's gospel and the reading from Genesis, the story of Joseph and his brothers.

**POINT 1:**

Our gospel reading today follows directly on from the reading last Sunday. There are many people present, but again Jesus directs his teaching to his disciples. *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you……do to others as you would have them do to you……Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do*

*not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you.* These are all very straightforward statements, but actually implementing them in our lives and living this way is very difficult.

**POINT 2:**

Love and forgiveness seem to go hand in hand. We love because we know we are forgiven. But remember Jesus is saying these words to his disciples before his crucifixion, long before they would have any understanding of the forgiveness that comes from the cross of Jesus. So why is Jesus asking his followers to be loving and forgiving? And why give them the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have them do to you) if they will not be able to live as loving and forgiving people? Because we choose to love and we choose to forgive or we choose to hate and we choose to be unforgiving. Biblical love is a command, not an option. It is not like romantic love, driven by feelings, but is much more pragmatic and realistic. Forgiveness is much the same. If we love, we forgive, but we do not have to forget. Unwillingness to forgive leads to all sorts of problems. Breakdown of relationships, avoidance, resentment, anger, rage, acting out, violence. The list is endless. And the damage is often greatest to the one who will not forgive. Whereas forgiveness enables us to love, an unwillingness to forgive damages our loving, isolates us and produces bitterness and resentment. It actually diminishes us.

**POINT 3:**

These themes of love and forgiveness are really well illustrated in the reading from Genesis we heard earlier. Let me set the scene for you. Joseph is the youngest of 12 brothers. His father is Jacob. Jacob is very fond of Joseph and his brothers become jealous. They are also put out because Joseph has dreams which they don’t like. So the brothers’

resentment boils over to rage and they decide to kill Joseph when he seeks them out in a field. But one brother feels guilty about their plan and suggests not to kill him, just to throw him in a well. Joseph is then taken out of the well and sold to some travellers. But the brothers take his coat and stain it with animal blood so that Jacob, his father, thinks that Joseph has been killed. Instead Joseph ends up in Egypt, in the court of Pharaoh. Pharaoh has some dreams that need interpreting and Joseph is the only one able to correctly interpret these dreams. This leads to Joseph being chosen to oversee the management of Egypt during 7 years of plenty, followed by 7 years of famine. And this takes us to our reading today which sees the brothers coming to Egypt again for food, because of the severity of the famine. But they never recognised Joseph, even though he recognised them from the very start. So here he is saying "*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.* So Joseph instructs his brothers to go to his father Jacob and move their entire family to the land of Goshen, so that they can survive the famine. And this is my favourite part of the story. *And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.*

**CONCLUSION:**

Both the Gospel reading and the Genesis reading remind us that love and forgiveness are intricately related. An unwillingness to forgive leads to all sorts of unhappiness, isolation, bitterness, resentment. In other words to all sorts of problems. It diminishes us as people and means that we are not loving the way Jesus would like us to love and live.

Just think of how much better life would be on this earth if

people could forgive, if countries could forgive, if political leaders could forgive. No wonder Jesus said from the cross, in Luke’s gospel, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”*