

**SUMMARY: JOSEPH'S REVENGE*****Genesis 45:1-15***

A liminal state is described as a place of transition, ‘...*occupying a position which is at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold*’<sup>n</sup>. It’s as we find ourselves toward the end of one thing and at the birthing of another... That’s just where, it seems, Jesus always wants us to be: *continually being released from whatever keeps us falsely rutted one way and leaning instead into the truth of what he reminds us is most real!*

Every time his disciples allowed themselves to become too settled in just their way of perceiving reality we see him telling a parable, or teaching a lesson, or enacting a miracle in order to shake them from where they’ve settled and stretch toward the realization of something better, deeper, much more real. That, it seems, is always God’s way of working with us!

We’ve spoken a lot recently about how there really is just this one reality, a God-created, Christ-secured and Holy Spirit-infused reality where everything is created to be in harmony with everything else: ...*ourselves, one another, creation and ultimately, with God!* That is what we pray will be revealed to us with *God’s kingdom coming on earth in us as it is in heaven. **ONE REALITY!*** ...but unfortunately not just one perception!

Just as there are so many different contexts in which we find ourselves, there are as many different ways of perceiving reality within those contexts, ways which we find are much more in line with our small or false selves: *It’s the realities we create where greed is good, and where hatred is fed, and where injustice is ignored and often even rewarded*. They hurt us, and yet we allow ourselves completely to buy into them, believing that they are all here is! **But our God will have none of it!** Everything that God *is* and *does* is meant to release us from the grip of what we allow to obscure our vision. It’s why Jesus came, and it’s what the risen Christ still does! **Jesus is the light by which we see our reality right - as it really is!** *Open our eyes, Lord... We want to see as YOU would have us see...*

But as we come to today’s message, let’s get really specific. Most of us enjoy a good revenge story: you know, when the hero who has been unjustly hurt by the bad guys and spends the rest of the narrative getting strong enough to wreak maximum revenge!

**Well, today’s text sets us up for an absolute humdinger:** Patriarch Jacob had had 4 women in his life: his two wives **Leah** (*whom he’d been tricked into marrying*) and **Rachel** (*his first love*). He also had two concubines, **Bilhah** and **Zilpah**, and between them they bore him 12 children. Rachel was by far his favourite, as were her two sons Joseph and Benjamin. The others were insanely jealous of their father’s love for Joseph, who seemed quite oblivious to their hatred & naively shared how he’d dreamt that one day all the brothers would bow down to him. *That did NOT go over well.* The last straw was when their dad gave Joseph – the ‘dreamer’ - a magnificent coat of many colours. Thanks to Andrew Lloyd Webber & Tim Rice most of us know the story fairly well: how the brothers seized him, sold him to a passing group of Ishmaelites, then killed a goat and dipped the coat in its blood, so that they could tell their dad that he’d been killed by a wild desert beast, using his ripped and bloodied coat as evidence. **Jacob was devastated!**

But in the meantime those Ishmaelites sold Joseph into Egypt - where by a series of pretty awesome events Joseph worked his way right up to being the most powerful person in the land, second only to the Pharaoh. Then there was a terrible famine but, because of Joseph's ingenuity and foresight, Egypt had plenty of food stored. Jacob, close to starving, sent his sons to Egypt to secure food for the family, which brought them face to face with Joseph whom, with all his regal pomp and splendor, they never recognized! But he recognized them: cowering as they were before him, totally at his mercy. What a great set up for taking revenge eh? I wonder what anyone of us would have done in that situation. That's the context for our reading of Genesis 45:1-15.

As *Christ-followers* we are always in profoundly liminal space – always being given a choice to remain stuck within every situation we may find ourselves or to stretch & grow, **to be defined by what 'seems' to be real or to give expression to what 'actually is'!** Of course there must have been enormous internal pressure on Joseph to seek retributive justice - to take revenge on the ones who had gone to so much trouble to hurt him, and so why would he move instead to a place of restorative justice, choosing to reinterpret what had happened so that instead of punishing them he could love and forgive them? Was it because, despite the worst of himself who must have wanted revenge, he was actually in the liminal space of being drawn toward – God's most real reality, one that prized reconciliation over vengeance?

I remember a South African Theology Professor speaking a group of young, activist, Anti-Apartheid students: ***"This unjust oppressive government will fall"***, he said, ***"but then the challenge will be for the liberated oppressed NOT to become the new oppressive government to oppress their previous oppressors. The challenge is to be drawn by something better; to become the means that causes the cycle of destruction and hatred to end!"*** He was - in a sense - calling for us to recognize the liminal space that we were in, in 1987 South Africa. He was urging us to lean God's way! **Just as Joseph did in response to his brothers!**

We are all always actually given to choose which reality we will allow primarily to drive us and our responses: will it be the obvious one that is so fear and hate-drenched, so filled with small-self justification and defensive bigotry that it's hardly us living at all, or will it be that which is revealed as created by God, secured by Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit?

How are you being given to embrace your own *liminality* and so being able to lean into another, infinitely more real reality, ...make God's difference!

**Towards what are you currently brandishing a fighting stick of hostility for self-defence or with which to wreak revenge, while God is longing for you instead to be demonstrating a better reality by waving an olive branch of healing reconciliation and peace?**

**It was not weak of Joseph to forgive and be reconciled to those who had done him harm, it was actually, powerful, Godly.** Instead of showing just mundane human justice, he chose to show sacred divine mercy! That's what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount<sup>ii</sup>: ***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called ... (children) of God.***

Can you imagine a world where we all started actually taking this seriously? It would be a world where Christ's revelations of restored forgiveness and reconciled relationship is more important than the enforcement of the hard retributive justice to which we all feel so entitled!

While I can't see the international superpower governments embracing this anytime soon, I can see us applying it at a much more personal level – and what a difference that would make! How about have or who are currently still hurting us?

**Towards what are you currently brandishing a fighting stick of hostility while God is longing for you instead – like Joseph - to be waving an olive branch of healing reconciliation and peace?**

May we allow ourselves to realize this liminal state in which we currently are – ...to have our eyes be opened open to a whole new vision of reality! One where love does actually win!

May it come to be that there is room for Christ's healing hope out there because we are in touch with Christ's healing hope in here. May we know it! Be it! And then, like Joseph, may we come to model it - LIVE IT: ...in our homes, in our communities, in our world...

Dear God, despite our circumstances, we're asking for 'Thou reality to be what MOST fills Our Vision', and defines our lives

May it be so, now and always

Amen

Rev Robin Jacobson

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<sup>i</sup>[https://www.google.com/search?q=liminal+meaning&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enCA771CA771&oq=liminal&aqs=chrome.5.69i57j0l2j46j0l4.3538j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=liminal+meaning&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA771CA771&oq=liminal&aqs=chrome.5.69i57j0l2j46j0l4.3538j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 5