

We are continuing with stories of reconciliation—both Biblical and others—old and new
Today, I want us to again look at an Old Testament story, before turning to a more modern story

Joseph—his story is found in Genesis 37-50

Joseph's father, like his father before him, played favorites and Joseph was his favorite son

Joseph is a tattler—telling on his older brothers and flaunting the gift of a special coat

He has a dream about his brothers bowing down to him, which he lords over them

His brothers take revenge by selling Joseph into slavery

They put blood on Joseph's coat to show their father he had been killed by a wild animal

Joseph ends up in Egypt as a slave to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials

He is successful as a slave, but accused of inappropriate behavior and put in jail

In jail, he gains a reputation of being able to interpret dreams as God reveals them to him

When Pharaoh has a troubling dream, Joseph is asked to interpret the dream

He predicts 7 years of great plenty, followed by 7 years of famine

Pharaoh makes Joseph a ruler in Egypt so they can store up food before the famine

The famine spreads throughout the region—including the land where Joseph's father, Jacob lives

Hearing that there is food in Egypt, Jacob sends 10 sons to Egypt, keeping the youngest

The brothers went before Joseph asking for food—not did not know it was Joseph

Joseph toys with them for a while—calls them spies

He asks that they bring the youngest brother, which they did

After toying with them for a time, Joseph sends everyone but his brothers out of the room

Then he reveals that he is Joseph, their brother and asks if his father still lives

The brothers panic knowing it is Joseph, but he persists, saying...

"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." Genesis 45:4-5 NRSV

They kiss and reconcile all around,

At Joseph's invitation the brothers return, bringing their father's household to Egypt

After Jacob's death, the brothers worry that Joseph will seek revenge for selling him into slavery

They ask Joseph to forgive them, making up a story that it was their father's request

And offering themselves as slaves to Joseph

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. Genesis 50:19-21 NRSV

This is story of a broken family—

But in the end, all the relationships in the family are healed

It takes time—years, in fact

Joseph doesn't ever say that it didn't matter what his brothers did to him

God transformed the evil they did into good, not only for others but for them too

God used the dumb thing they did and made good out of it

In the end, healing comes to the whole family and to the whole country and region too

Do we look to God to heal our broken relationships, when we don't know how to heal them?

Do we trust that God can even use our mistakes to bring about good?

Is God's healing for us, part of God's larger purposes in the world?

Apartheid was a system of institutionalized racial segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948-1990s
The government encouraged state repression of Black Africans for benefit of the minority white
Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990 after 27 years of confinement
“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.” Nelson Mandela
Negotiations from 1990-1991 culminated in a transitional period with elections in 1994
Nelson Mandela was elected president—South Africa's first democratically elected President
He invited his jailer, a white man named Christo Brand, to his 1994 presidential inauguration
They became friends in the prison system as Brand grew to respect Mandela
252 out of 400 seats in Parliament went to the African National Congress
In reality, this was the beginning of the end of apartheid

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up by the new parliament and endorsed by Mandela
Their mandate was to investigate gross human rights violations perpetrated during apartheid
It included violations by both the state and the liberation movements
There was controversy around the fact that the TRC was empowered to grant amnesty
to perpetrators who confessed their crimes truthfully and completely to the commission
Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu with 9 men and 8 women, plus 300 staff
It was a court-like restorative justice body
As compared to the Nuremberg Trials of Nazis, which used retributive justice or punishment
Mandela knew that for South Africa to move forward as a free democracy and a united nation,
these stories of human rights violation could not be swept under the rug
Mandela insisted that the country needed healing even more than it needed justice
Despite some flaws, it is generally (although not universally) thought to have been successful
Success was complicated by the random acts of violence without knowing who did what
In addition, thousands of records were destroyed just before Mandela took office
Yet, with the world watching, the TRC emphasized a path to healing through forgiveness

27 countries have established Truth and Reconciliation Commissions
Most are government established, but in the US, they are all created by local organizers
A common theme of truth commissions lies in rewriting a nation's history
to provide a history of events that honors and respects the truth of the past
By rewriting history, the truth is not forgotten—like South Africa, it is public for all to see
It helps communities create institutions to address the underlying causes of violence

Some stories told to TRC were difficult and hard to reconcile—laying bare the truth of apartheid
Craddock Four... The police ambushed their car, killed them in a gruesome manner, set their car
on fire. When, at a TRC hearing, the teenage daughter of one of the victims was asked:
would you be able to forgive the people who did this to you and your family? She
answered, “We would like to forgive, but we would just like to know who to forgive.”
Mandela led an entire country in choosing forgiveness—modeling a new way to combat injustice

Both of our stories today, are stories of victims who rose above their victimization
People who ultimately gained power
Having the power to destroy, they extended grace and forgiveness
Forgiveness and reconciliation begin with telling the truth
First, tell the truth, then see what God will do
“When a deep injury is done to us, we never heal until we forgive.” Nelson Mandela