

**‘THE ULTIMATE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION’**

**Pentecost 13----Sept. 11 (2011) A**

**H.G. Matthew 18:21-35**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading Genesis 50:15-21**

**Emmanuel’s – Bellevue 2011**

**WHILE THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD—‘SHY AWAY’ FROM CONFLICT-A SMALL MINORITY OF PERSONS ‘THRIVE’ ON IT -THERE ARE THOSE FOR WHOM,--- ‘CONFLICT’ IS---- ‘A WAY OF LIFE.’ -YOU KNOW FOLKS LIKE THAT. SO DO I!  
-THAT’S WHY, THERE IS A HIGHLY TRAINED-- GROUP OF PEOPLE ---WHO DEDICATE THEIR LIVES TO THE VERY PROFITABLE (FOR THEM) -----  
-PROFESSION---KNOWN AS--- ‘CONFLICT MANAGEMENT’(2)---  
-THAT DEALS WITH ‘THE TASK’--- OF ‘REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.’  
-TODAY, THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF ----9/11----WHAT BETTER SUBJECT COULD WE BE THINKING ABOUT THAN ----“CONFLICT RESOLUTION’---  
“CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?”**

**IN TODAY’S FIRST READING—FROM GENESIS---WE ARE ‘CONFRONTED’ WITH THE CONCLUSION OF ONE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT’S ‘FINEST-STORIES’---- “THE JOSEPH STORY.” REMEMBER THAT ONE FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL DAYS? I LOVE THAT STORY--- ‘THE JOSEPH STORY’ IT’S CALLED. SO---SIT BACK,--RELAX-- AND LET ME TELL IT TO YOU.**

**JOSEPH, YOU MAY REMEMBER, WAS THE SON OF JACOB---AND, THE ‘FAVORITE’---OF ALL HIS SONS.  
-JOSEPH WAS THE ELDEST SON OF JACOB’S ‘FAVORITE WIFE’---RACHEL.  
-JOSEPH HAD A MUCH YOUNGER BROTHER----BENJAMIN—ALSO BORN TO HIS MOTHER, RACHEL.  
-IN ADDITION, JOSEPH HAD TEN OTHER BROTHERS (REALLY HALF-BROTHERS) BORN TO JACOB’S OTHER WIFE, LEAH.**

**NOW JOSEPH---WAS LITERALLY --- ‘A SPOILED BRAT.’  
-ANY PARENT --WHO ‘PLAYS FAVORITES’—AMONG THEIR OFF-SPRING -- ALWAYS PLAYS ----‘AN EXTREMELY DANGEROUS GAME.’  
-BUT--- THAT’S HOW IT WAS WITH THIS FAMILY.  
-JOSEPH WAS JACOB’S ‘DARLING,’ HIS ‘PET,’ HIS ‘FAVORITE.’  
-AND WHILE OLD JACOB EXPECTED HIS TEN OLDER SONS TO BE OUT WORKING IN THE FIELDS EVERYDAY----  
- JOSEPH STAYED AT HOME,-- FOR HIS FATHER TO ENJOY.  
-AND THAT ‘DOTING FATHER’---JACOB—HEAPED ‘A LOT OF PERKS’--- ON HIS SON JOSEPH—PERKS THE OTHER BOYS DID NOT RECEIVE.  
-ALL OF US REMEMBER HOW JOSEPH---GOT A ‘COAT OF MANY COLORS’---- AND ‘FLAUNTED THAT COAT TO HIS OLDER BROTHERS---AND HOW, BECAUSE OF THAT---THOSE BROTHERS REALLY DESPISED HIM.**

**-JOSEPH, IN ADDITION, WAS YOUNG, SMART, HANDSOME, VERY GIFTED---  
AND TENDED TO-- 'LORD IT OVER' HIS BROTHERS.  
-AND---HE GOT AWAY WITH IT---WHICH ONLY INCREASED THEIR  
HATRED OF HIM.**

**THEN IT HAPPENED! ONE ESPECIALLY HOT AFTERNOON, WHILE THE  
OLDER BROTHERS WERE OUT WORKING IN THE FIELDS-----AND JOSEPH'S  
YOUNGER BROTHER, BENJAMIN---STILL A BABE IN ARMS-----  
-JOSEPH, THAT MORNING, WAS 'LOUNGING AROUND'---AS USUAL---  
-WHEN ALL IT ONCE HIS DAD---JACOB—CALLED TO HIM:  
-'HEY, JOSEPH, LOAD UP A CART WITH SOME REFRESHMENTS AND TAKE  
THEM OUT TO YOUR BROTHERS, WORKING IN THE FIELD.  
-GATHERING A HUGE SUPPLY OF (WHATEVER COKES AND PIZZAS WERE  
BACK THEN)---  
-AND PROUDLY PUTTING ON THAT 'COAT OF MANY COLORS'----HIS  
FATHER HAD GIVEN HIM—  
-JOSEPH BEGAN THE LONG TREK--- OUT TO FARTHER FIELDS.  
-SEEING HIM COMING—FROM A LONG WAY OFF---THOSE BROTHERS  
THOUGHT TO THEMSELVES----'AH HA!'  
-'NOW'S THE TIME FOR US TO DEAL PERMANENTLY WITH OUR BELOVED  
BROTHER.  
-AND THEY DECIDED---ALL BUT ONE OF THEM---THAT THEY WOULD KILL  
JOSEPH---TAKE THAT BLASTED COAT OF MANY COLORS---DIP IT IN BLOOD---  
AND TELL DEAR OLD DAD----  
-THAT SOME WILD ANIMAL HAD ATTACKED JOSEPH----THAT THEY'D  
DISCOVERED HIS BODY, OUT THERE IN THE FIELDS-----AND, (THEY THOUGHT  
TO THEMSELVES) "WE'LL BE RID OF THIS AGGREGATING BROTHER OF  
OURS ---FOREVER..**

**JUST AS THEY WERE ABOUT 'TO DO JOSEPH IN'---THE ELDEST BROTHER,  
REUBEN—BEGAN TO HAVE 'SECOND THOUGHTS'----ABOUT THE PLAN.  
-RECOGNIZING THAT HIS BROTHERS---'MEANT BUSINESS'---AND WERE 'OUT  
FOR BLOOD'----REUBEN SAID SHREWDLY---  
-'HEY GUYS, JUST KILLING HIM'S TOO EASY. LET'S MAKE HIM SUFFER.  
STRIP OFF HIS CLOTHES, DIG A PIT HERE IN THE SAND, TOSS HIM IN  
AND LET HIM DIE SLOWLY.'  
-DEATH BY DEHYDRATION (BY THE WAY) IS A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE.  
-REUBEN'S PLAN WAS TO WAIT TILL EVERYONE WAS ASLEEP THAT  
NIGHT----AND THEN LET JOSEPH GO.  
-HOWEVER—AS YOU MAY REMEMBER FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL DAYS----  
JUST AS THIS WHOLE SCENARIO WAS BEING PLAYED OUT-----  
-A CARAVAN—BOUND FOR EGYPT ---CAME ALONG.  
-AND, 'THE REST IS HISTORY!'**

**SOLD INTO SLAVERY, JOSEPH IS TAKEN TO EGYPT---WHERE, AFTER A NUMBER OF ‘FASCINATING EVENTS’-----  
-HE EMERGES AS PRIME MINISTER---‘THE NUMBER 2’ POLITICAL FIGURE IN THE COUNTRY—  
-AND SAVES THE PEOPLE OF EGYPT AND THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONS--- FROM ‘THE SEVEN YEAR FAMINE’ THAT HAD DEVASTATED THEM.  
-AND OLD JACOB, THINKING ALL ALONG HIS BELOVED SON WAS DEAD—HAD GONE INTO ‘DEEP MOURNING’ FOR JOSEPH---  
-AND THOSE MURDEROUS BROTHERS----CALLOUSLY LET THEIR FATHER GRIEVE----AND FORGOT ALL ABOUT THEIR BROTHER.**

**THEY FORGOT ALL ABOUT HIM---UNTIL---THEY-- HAD TO GO TO EGYPT— ONLY SOURCE OF FOOD IN THE AREA TO BUY GRAIN AND— ESCAPE THE FAMINE THEMSELVES.  
-AND, AFTER A GREAT DEAL OF ‘INTRIGUE’----THEY FINALLY DISCOVERED THEIR BROTHER WAS NOT ONLY ALIVE—BUT LITERALLY ‘RULED’ THE MIGHTY EGYPTIAN EMPIRE.  
-AT FIRST THE BROTHERS DIDN’T RECOGNIZE JOSEPH.  
-BUT THEN, AFTER PLAYING A FEW ‘TRICKS’ ON THEM----  
-JOSEPH TAKES THEM INTO HIS PRIVATE CHAMBERS—ALONE, AND DISCLOSES HIMSELF TO THEM---- SAYING SIMPLY:  
-“I AM JOSEPH, YOUR BROTHER.”**

**YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED! EVERY ONE OF THOSE BROTHERS ‘HIT THE DECK’---GROVELING IN TERROR-----ON THE FLOOR----  
-THINKING THEY WERE ABOUT TO LOSE THEIR LIVES FOR WHAT THEY HAD DONE TO HIM PREVIOUSLY.  
-AND IN ONE OF ---‘THE-MOST-AMAZING’---SCRIPTURAL PORTRAITS OF ‘FORGIVNESS,’ ‘HEALING’ AND ‘RESTORATION OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS’—JOSEPH LIFTS HIS BROTHERS UP, EMBRACES THEM, APOLOGIZES TO THEM FOR HIS PREVIOUS ‘ARROGANCE’----  
-SAYING: “HEY GUYS, I’M REALLY SORRY! I WAS A SPOILED BRAT! NO WONDER YOU HATED ME SO MUCH!”  
-THEN, JOSEPH MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIS BROTHERS AND ALL THE FAMILY TO COME DOWN TO THE RELATIVE SAFETY OF EGYPT.  
-AND THIS INCIDENT---ENDS FOREVER THE CONFLICT THAT HAD ARISEN BETWEEN THE BROTHERS.**

**WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF ‘CONFLICT. WARS. CRIME. ACTS OF TERRORISM, STRIKES, POLITICAL FEUDS---  
-ALL THESE---ARE REALLY ONLY--- ‘THE SUM TOTAL’---OF SO MANY ‘INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS’---**

**-CONFLICTS BETWEEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS, --SIBLINGS, --PARENTS AND CHILDREN,-- HUSBANDS AND WIVES, --NEIGHBOR AND NEIGHBOR, OLD AND YOUNG. BLACK AND WHITE.  
-FEW, IF ANY OF US ARE 'IMMUNE' TO CONFLICT --IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER.**

**THE CHURCH ITSELF IS NOT IMMUNE—TO CONFLICT. WE SEE IT IN OUR OWN CONGREGATION.  
--YET THE CHURCH OF OUR LORD JESUS---IN THIS TROUBLED WORLD---  
-WAS INTENDED BY HIM TO BE ---A 'SCHOOL OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT,' 'CONFLICT RESOLUTION'---  
-A SCHOOL (LITERALLY) ---FOR THE 'MENDING OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS'---  
-A SCHOOL ---IN WHICH, WE,-- GOD'S CHILDREN---ARE TO LEARN THE 'ART'----(AND IT IS AN 'ART')---  
-THE 'ART' OF BUILDING AND REBUILDING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.**

**HEAVEN ONLY KNOWS---THERE ARE PLENTY OF SCHOOLS IN WHICH WE LEARN 'WAR' AND 'CONFLICT.'  
-OUR HARD-EARNED-TAX-DOLLARS-----IN THIS COUNTRY---SUPPORT THREE 'MILITARY ACADEMIES'---  
-AND-- 'A GRADUATE SCHOOL'---CALLED--- (WOULD YOU BELIEVE?) "THE WAR COLLEGE(2)."  
-I'VE VISITED 'THE WAR COLLEGE' IN VIRGINIA---AND KNOW THREE 'WAR-COLLEGE-GRADUATES'---- AND I'M NOT 'KNOCKING' THE NEED --FOR OUR BELOVED NATION --TO BE 'MILITARILY STRONG.'  
-THAT'S JUST THE KIND OF WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE----A WORLD WHERE WE, AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A NATION----HAVE TO BE 'STRONG,' 'ALERT' AND— 'ON GUARD!'  
-BUT ISN'T IT IRONIC THAT WE HAVE A 'COLLEGE'—DEDICATED TO THE ART OF--- 'MAKING WAR?'**

**YET, IN THIS WORLD OF CONFLICT—THE CHURCH OF OUR LORD JESUS--- IS INTENDED --BY HIM----TO BE--- 'DIFFERENT.'  
-THE CHURCH WAS MEANT TO BE—A 'COMMUNITY' OF 'RECONCILIATION' AND 'FORGIVENESS.'  
-THIS CONGREGATION--- 'WAS' INTENDED TO BE---AND 'IS' INTENDED TO BE, A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE 'GET ALONG'--- 'LOVE AND SUPPORT' EACH OTHER.'  
-TOO OFTEN WE FORGET THAT!**

PLEASE NOTICE---HOW ALL OF THE THREE APPOINTED SCRIPTURAL READINGS –FOR TODAY—  
-DEAL WITH ‘FORGIVENESS’ AND ‘THE HEALING OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS.  
-WE’RE TOLD IN THE SECOND READING---FROM ROMANS----  
‘NOT TO PASS JUDGMENT ON OTHERS. ---  
-‘DO NOT PASS JUDGMENT ON ANYONE (ST. PAUL SAYS)—FOR GOD HIMSELF IS THE ‘ONLY’ AND ‘ULTIMATE’-- JUDGE OVER ALL”.  
-THEN, IN TODAY’S GOSPEL---WE HAVE THAT FAMOUS PARABLE---  
OUR LORD TOLD----WHEREIN THERE IS LAID OUT FOR US---  
-THE EXPECTATION---THAT WE ARE TO BE ‘FORGIVING.’  
-MEANING ---AS THE SERMON THEME FOR TODAY SUGGESTS---  
THAT ‘FORGIVENESS’ IS --- THE ‘ULTIMATE’-- IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

IN THIS PARABLE--- THAT IS TODAY’S GOSPEL---- OUR LORD TELLS THE STORY (SIMILAR IN A WAY TO ‘THE JOSEPH STORY’)---  
-ABOUT A SERVANT---WHO OWED HIS MASTER A ‘HUGE DEBT’----  
OWED HIM ‘AN HUMONGOUS AMOUNT OF MONEY.’  
-AND,---WHEN HE COULDN’T REPAY THE DEBT-----HIS MASTER HAD PITY ON HIM----‘FORGAVE THE DEBT,’—COMPLETELY---‘ WROTE IT OFF.’  
IN AN AMAZING ACT OF GENEROSITY.  
-BUT THEN--THAT FORGIVEN SERVANT,-- WENT OUT AND DEALT HARSHLY ----WITH A FELLOW SERVANT---WHO OWED HIM A RELATIVELY SMALL AMOUNT OF MONEY. ---  
-A SMALL DEBT THAT WAS ‘AN-INFINITESIMAL FRACTION’--- OF WHAT HE HIMSELF HAD OWED---AND THEN HAD BEEN FORGIVEN.  
-A MAN WHO,--- FOR HIS ‘LACK OF MERCY’-----HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO ‘FORGIVE AS HE HAD BEEN FORGIVEN’---WAS ROUNDLY CONDEMNED—AND FORCED TO REPAY THE HUGE DEBT HE’D ORIGINALLY OWED.

THIS LITTLE PARABLE---TEACHES US THE LESSON----THAT OUR LORD LOVED TO TEACH-----  
-NAMELY---THAT ‘WE’ MUST FORGIVE-----IN ORDER ‘TO BE’ FORGIVEN.  
-THE ONE WHO DOES NOT FORGIVE----CANNOT EXPECT TO BE FORGIVEN.  
-REMEMBER HOW JESUS SAID IT IN ‘THE BEATITUDES’-----  
‘BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL! THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY!’

NO SOONER HAD OUR LORD TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES --THAT PRAYER WE CALL “THE LORD’S PRAYER”----  
-THAN HE WENT ON TO ‘EXPLAIN’-----ONE OF THAT PRAYERS MOST DIFFICULT PETITIONS.  
-YOU KNOW THE ONE I’M TALKING ABOUT----“FORGIVE US OUR SINS, FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS---FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES----AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US---TRESPASS AGAINST US!”

**-IF WE'RE NOT FORGIVING---WE CAN'T EXPECT TO BE FORGIVEN.  
-NOT ENDING IT THERE, OUR LORD WENT ON TO SAY "FOR IF YOU  
FORGIVE OTHERS THEIR TRESPASSES---YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER WILL  
FORGIVE YOU—BUT---IF YOU DO NOT FORGIVE OTHERS THEIR TRESPASSES,  
NEITHER WILL GOD FORGIVE YOUR TRESPASSES, DEBTS AND SINS.**

**THERE YOU HAVE IT--- 'THE ULTIMATE' IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION---  
F-O-R-G-I-V-E-N-E-S-S(2)!**

**-FORGIVENESS IS NOT EASY----AS ANY OF YOU WHO HAVE TRIED TO  
DO IT—IN EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES----WELL KNOW.  
-FORGIVENESS CAN OFTEN BE A 'PAINFUL,' 'DIFICULT' PROCESS.**

**A WOMAN'S HUSBAND WAS DISCOVERED TO BE UNFAITHFUL. AFTER  
BEING 'FOUND OUT'----HE FIRST OF ALL DENIED IT--- LIED ABOUT IT---THEN,  
WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE TRUTH—AND WAS LITERALLY 'CAUGHT IN  
THE ACT'-----HE---IN A FIT OF ANGER— LEFT HIS WIFE--OF ELEVEN YEARS  
JUST 'WALKED OUT' ON HER.**

**-HE WAS GONE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS---LIVED ALONE—WAS MISERABLE---  
BEGAN TO REALIZE WHAT HE'D DONE—HOW STUPIDLY HE'D ACTED---  
REALIZED HOW MUCH HE STILL LOVED HIS WIFE.**

**-HE BEGGED HER---ON BENDED KNEE –LITERALLY ---TO 'FORGIVE HIM,' TO  
'TAKE HIM BACK,' 'GIVE HIM A SECOND CHANCE.'**

**-SHE DID. SHE FORGAVE HIM----BUT LATER SAID: "IT'S SO HARD---EVERY  
TIME HE LOOKS AT ME, EVERY TIME HE TOUCHES ME—I CAN'T HELP  
BUT THINK OF HOW HE BETRAYED ME."**

**-"IT'S NOT EASY TO BE FORGIVING" ---SHE SAID.**

**FORGIVING OTHERS, ---FINDING THE INNER RESOURCES TO 'LET GO' ALL  
THE -ANGER, -HURT, -RESENTMENT, -EMBARRASSMENT---**

**-AND TO--- 'LET GO'-- OUR NEED FOR -VENGEANCE, -RETRIBUTION AND  
PAYBACK—**

**-REQUIRES A SPECIAL KIND OF STRENGTH THAT DOESN'T COME EASILY.**

**LET'S FACE IT----FORGIVENESS ISN'T EASY EVEN FOR GOD HIMSELF!**

**-THINK OF HOW MUCH IT COST GOD TO BE FORGIVING OF US---**

**HIS SINFUL, DISOBEDIENT CHILDREN---THE DEATH OF HIS OWN, BELOVED  
SON.**

**IT TAKES A CONSCIOUS ACT OF WILL—TO MAKE OURSELVES 'FORGIVE'  
AND 'FORGET.'**

**-THAT'S TRUE. NOT ONLY FOR US---BUT FOR GOD.**

**-THE 'ULTIMATE' IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEN—IS FORGIVENESS**

**.-NOT EASY---CERTAINLY-- BUT—THAT IS GOD'S EXPECTATION OF US.**

