

*CRIBB<S>NOTE – August 17, 2008*

Forgiveness is not always easy, and it is not easy to love; especially, when someone has harmed us or broken our hearts. In fact, in American life, we are given messages directly not to forgive or love anyone who may threaten us.

A scant survey of movies and messages disseminated through popular culture would reveal the constant instruction that the best solution to any problem is the use of a gun. We are told with blatant, not-so-subtle images on television and the big screen that the person with the biggest, most powerful weapon can stop any threat.

The other message suggests forgiveness is weakness. A call for dialogue or conversation with a perceived enemy is said to act outside the best interest of the nation. Everyday, we see and hear graphic depictions of examples that negate the power of love and forgiveness.

Of course, there are many people who dismiss such critiques as an expected perspective among clergy. That is, among some clergy who are labeled “leftists,” “naïve,” or “out of touch with reality.”

Yet, forgiveness and love are all we have left. Our ability to absorb assaults without retaliation gives us a measure of power to quell disaster. But, many of us don't believe that and won't risk testing its possibility. So, we continue to fall prey to the pervasive influences of dangerous practices that perpetuate a perennial state of fear.

Even as Christians who profess to follow the teachings of Jesus, too often we pause at any serious advocacy to extend forgiveness. We cringe at the thought of actually making room for an offender to arrive at a path of mercy. We insist on clinging to our identity with Christ but we refuse to live in a way that embodies love and forgiveness.

Following the hard sermon on Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery, the Genesis story goes on through Chapter 50 with the remarkable act of reconciliation. Instead of begrudging his brothers for their treachery, Joseph receives them and supplies them with food and shelter. He forgives them for their murderous hearts.

Some of us may rejoice as this story leads to a suitable and happy ending. We may be tempted to believe God orchestrated Joseph's tormented experiences. We may jump to conclusions about the role of evil to heighten the possibilities of good. But, to succumb to such notions may not provide an accurate account of inhumane treatment.

Joseph's ability to retain his humanity and never lose sight of his familial ties made it possible for him to forgive his brothers. He did not allow himself to diminish his capacity to love those who desired his death. He did not become an instrument of strife and upheaval within his family. Instead, through forgiveness and love, Joseph became the source of life for a nation that would be born through his family.

There is great power in love and forgiveness. We are encouraged to live our faith fully by loving and forgiving the most unlikable folk near and far from us. If we can be like Joseph, we will come closer to Christ.