

# 14th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19)

## POWER TO RECONCILE

Genesis 50:15–21

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Analysis by Bill White

15Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" 16So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 17'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." 19But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? 20Even 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. 21So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Looking for Reconciliation in the Wrong Places

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Developing a Deceitful Plan for Reconciliation*

The brothers of Joseph have a problem. They would like to believe that they have been truly reconciled to Joseph, but now that their father has died they are not sure. Are things really okay, or has Joseph just been holding back for the sake of dad? How will he deal with them now? The brothers have known for years that they were guilty of selling off Joseph and deceiving Jacob. Are they now about to experience the righteous wrath of a vengeful and powerful brother?

The brothers' fear and anxiety over this situation moves them to hatch a plan. They will rely on deception one more time by fabricating a message, a last request, from Jacob to Joseph, "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you."

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *Faith in a Deceitful Plan for Reconciliation*

Underlying this is an even deeper problem, namely, the brothers have not put their faith in the Lord God to effect a real and lasting reconciliation with Joseph. Their faith is in the deceptive plan of their own making, i.e. their faith is in their own wisdom and actions to save them from their predicament and bring about a lasting reconciliation.

What these brothers do not see is that the guilt and anxiety they have carried around for years—that is now once again filling them with fear—is not the thing they should fear most. What they really should fear is God's judgment upon their sin. They do not even see that their real need is to be reconciled to God.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Reconciliation Grounded in Deceit and Human Power Is No Reconciliation at All*  
Worse still, reconciliation achieved by deceit and grounded in faith in anything or anybody other than the one true God—Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit—will ultimately fail and lead to death. Joseph's brothers' kind of reconciliation is a conflict just waiting to happen, as the history of Israel so clearly demonstrates. Even Joseph recognizes that his brothers are looking in the wrong place when he asks, "Am I in the place of God?" Joseph's brothers' deepest need is not to be reconciled to their family members, as important as that may be. Their deepest need is to be reconciled to God.

## **PROGNOSIS: Looking for Reconciliation in the Right Place**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *True Reconciliation Is in Christ***

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will indeed bring about the possibility of true reconciliation. Almighty God comes in the person of Jesus Christ who takes the sin of the world upon himself, dies on the cross, and rises again so that by faith in Christ and his atoning work, true reconciliation is possible. As Saint Paul writes, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Faith in Christ Reconciles Us to God***

This reconciliation with God is available to all people through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus comes to us by the power of the Holy Spirit offering to exchange saving, reconciling faith for our idolatrous, misplaced faith. No longer will we rely on our own plans and schemes to achieve reconciliation with God and others. Being in Christ, we trust his power and promises to

reconcile us to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *God Uses Us as Agents of True Reconciliation in the World***

Moreover, faith in Jesus Christ trumps the power of our fears and anxieties so that we are empowered and equipped for God's ministry of reconciliation in the world. By the power of faith in Christ at work in us, we are able to bring others to reconciliation with God and to bring about reconciliation among others. The message of reconciliation has been entrusted to us!