

**Remembering and Celebration (Gen. 33:1-11)**

Let us pray:

Gracious God. Thank you for your presence here with us as we open our heart and mind to listen to your word. Please come to each one of us, so that your Spirit might be evident among us. We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Next Monday is Choo-Seok, Korean Thanksgiving Day, one of the most important national holidays in Korea. Normally Korean Thanksgiving Day comes a little earlier than the Canadian one but this year it turns out to be early September making one month apart from the Canadian Thanksgiving Day. Anyway, a few days ago, my daughter asked me whether we are going to celebrate the Korean Thanksgiving Day or the Canadian one. Her main question was on what we are going to eat, whether a Korean dish or turkey, and we peacefully decided on chicken, aiming to reach compromise between two different cultures that we love. At the end of our conversation, she said. "Mom, I think we should celebrate one or the other. If we don't, we miss an important part of our life."

I am not certain whether I replied or not, but it made me think: "what is the meaning of celebration?" and "why do we celebrate anyway?"

Going back to Choo-Seok, Korean Full Moon, the holiday means a ritual celebration of thanksgiving to Korean people. In Choo-Seok, family members gather

together and give thanks to their ancestors that they are well taken care of. People celebrate their abundant harvest, in spite of drought, flood, or typhoon, and give thanks to God, the divine and Almighty one in heaven. This year the railroads, highways on the Korean Peninsula, for sure, will be covered with cars as people head to their hometown to meet their parents, brothers, and sisters. In this sense, Choo-Seok is about family reunion.

Can I say everybody is looking forward to the day? Probably not!

At least not for those who are afraid of meeting people, especially family members, like Jacob in today's passage.

Here, in Genesis Chapter 33, Jacob meets his twin brother Esau 20 years later since he fled from his hometown. At the beginning of the chapter in verse 1 and 2, Jacob is greatly afraid that his brother would kill him and his family. At the end of the chapter, however, Jacob finally finds peace and sets up an altar, thanking God. Here, Jacob remembers how good God has been to him and to his family, in a true celebration.

By the way, this Jacob is not the one we know 20 years ago. Jacob seems to have changed a lot. As far as we remember, Jacob was 'ever clever' enough to take Esau's birthright and blessings from his father Isaac. He took Esau's birthright in return for some bread and lentil stew, and he even lied to his father that he is Esau to get blessings from him. Certainly, Jacob's story is a story of conflict – conflict recurring from human desire, jealousy, and greediness, longing for wealth, descendants, power and status. The conflict exists even before his birth! So, his personality makes us wonder. We think his deceitfulness deserves to be forsaken. What can we learn from Jacob's story then? What is underlying in this story?

To answer this question, I will talk about Jacob's internal changes. Jacob was in great fear and distress before meeting his brother. He suffered and struggled as he thought about Esau's upcoming revenge. He suffered because he knew he had wronged his brother. However, there was no need for his suffering and struggle. No one was forcing him to meet his brother or return to his hometown. It had already been 20 years since he had left his hometown. Who cared! Nobody was searching for him. He could have continued to stay in his home, enjoying his wealthy life with his big family.

However, despite the wealth and comforts of his new life, against all common sense, he decided to return home, and to fulfill a mission: to reconcile with Esau. How did Jacob come to this realization? Over the 20 years working as a shepherd for his uncle Lavan, this was not a sudden realization. Rather, it had been growing inside of him. He may have realized that he struggled with people when God was not present. He may have been recalling his life. His uncle's deceitful behaviour could have also reminded Jacob of his own malicious acts he had done to his family. Despite his struggle to forget and hide the truth from himself, he could never forget. Indeed, it takes twenty long years for Jacob to repent.

In Jacob's prayer in Genesis Chapter 32 verses 11-12, Jacob recalls God's blessing and begs for his help. He asks God, "Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me..... But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

Upon remembering God's promise and his sin, he asks for God's help. He even wrestles with God and receives a blessing from him. After that, with great fear and

anxiety, Jacob meets Esau who is with his 400 men around him. Jacob goes on and bows down to the ground seven times as he approaches his brother. Surprisingly, Esau runs to meet Jacob and embraces him, and he puts his arms around his brother's neck and kisses him. They even weep together!

Jacob's story shows human celebration and remembrance of God's grace upon Jacob and his family, and miraculous reconciliation with his brother. Jacob suffered for twenty years, but he never failed to remember and thank God because he accepted his past years and tried to be connected to God by facing his wounded condition through healing by God. In this way, he was able to enter into a new way of living and emerge a new man from Jacob, which means 'deceiving,' to Israel, which means 'he struggles with God.'

In this sense, we probably have had the same discovery as Jacob's own: "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it." God's love and forgiveness are present even when we are unworthy. God's guiding hand is present as long as we try to remember our past and confront it. Memory brings us anxiety, guilt, fear and shame. However, all our pains and wounds will be healed as long as we remember our sins and accept them, and ask for God's forgiveness.

Remembering always urges us to put into practise what we have learned. Indeed, Jacob fulfilled his duty by listening to his inner voice, and was able to repent, reconcile with his past. Reconciliation with his past allows him to be fully healed by God.

Henry Nouwen says in his book, *The Living Reminder* that "healing means revealing that our humans' wounds, which are most intimately connected with the suffering of God himself." As he points out, it is Christ in us from whom healing comes.

Only Christ can break through our human alienation and restore the broken connections with each other and with God like the story of Jacob.

I would say, true peace from God and true meaning of salvation will finally be given when you have a good relation with people and God at the same time like Jacob in today's passage.

Upcoming season of harvest is the time for us to celebrate, becoming the unity with God and people. When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, like Jacob did. When we look for God's help and His healing hands with a God-fearing heart like Jacob did, God will sincerely listens to and answers for us, and finally peace in Jesus Christ comes upon us.

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Loving God:

Make us thankful with all that you have given to us. Restore us in our relation so that we may truly celebrate salvation in Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**