

Seeing the Good

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
On Sunday, August 14, 2011

I love television commercial that asks the question, "Was Abraham Lincoln really as honest as history tells us?" The ad then proceeds to show a video clip in which Mrs. Lincoln walks up to honest Abe and asks, "Does this dress make me look fat?" If you haven't seen the commercial you need to know that it isn't the dress that is making her 'look' fat; she is fat. Honest Abe struggles to answer his wife's question. The expressions on his face as he debates with himself: do I tell her the truth or do I tell a lie? Finally, honest Abe's hand comes up and with his thumb and fore finger separated just a little we hear him reply, "Well, just a little."

Sometimes it is hard for us to tell others the truth and sometimes it is difficult for us to hear the truth about ourselves. Have you ever told a lie only to be caught later in the lie? One lie begets another lie and soon you have so many lies built on top of each other that you cannot keep them straight. Sometimes we tell such a long string of lies that we cannot remember the original lie that started the whole scheme and we wind up living in fear – fear that we will fail to remember our lies and get caught or fear that people will find out who we really are.

Last week we learned about ourselves through the sons of Jacob, also known as Israel. The eleven brothers of Joseph schemed to get rid of him. They sold Joseph into slavery to an Ishmaelite caravan heading to Egypt and then returned home to tell their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, his body devoured and lost in the wilderness.

We too harbor jealousy toward others. We wish that we were our parent's favorite; we wish that we were as smart as the star student. We ask, why can't I be as good looking as him or as successful as her? Why did he get the raise or the promotion and not me? Sometimes our jealousy gets the better of us and wind up doing things that we normally wouldn't think of doing. We try to make the favored one look bad; we make fun of the popular one or tease the ones being taunted by the popular kids; we scheme to make our fellow employees look bad while trying to make ourselves look better. We tell lie after lie until the whole house of lies comes tumbling down and we stand exposed.

Joseph's brothers lied to their father, Jacob, and to themselves.

They lived with their lie for years. We can only image the lies that they must have fed their father when he started asking questions: what kind of animal killed Joseph; why didn't the 11 of you do something to stop the animal; where exactly did this happen-take me to the place; and on and on? Lie after lie thinking all the time that they were done with Joseph and

would never have to come clean with their father or themselves.

Are you living with a lie right now? Have you held on to it for a long time hoping that no one will find out? Then you know how the lie of Joseph's death haunted his 11 brothers. You know the waking up in the middle of the night from a dream that caused you to sweat. You know how lies can hurt others but they haunt and torment the one who has told the lie. And then there is the time when your lie is exposed. Someone finds out and confronts you. You try to deny it and squirm out of it telling a whole new string of lies in an attempt to cover your tracks.

During a time of draught and famine Joseph's brothers came face-to-face with their lies. Jacob sent them to Egypt to secure food for his starving family and in the process discovered that Joseph was alive and well. In fact they discovered that Joseph had risen to a position of authority in Egypt and that now they depended on him for their survival. The tables had turned and Joseph had a little bit of fun with his brothers before finally bringing the whole family to Egypt. While Joseph did not bear the promise of God entrusted to Abraham, to Isaac and then to his father Jacob; Joseph played a vital role in keeping the promise alive and moving into the future. Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, hated and despised by his brothers, became the

one who offered life to his family after they thought he was dead.

Lies are not good. Even honest Abe knew that when he said to his wife that the dress may have made her look a little fat. If you have ever told a lie and been caught you know it is not worth it. If you have ever been lied to and then found out you know how much better the truth would have been from the beginning. Knowing all of this, many of us will leave here today holding on to lies that have haunted us for what seems like forever. Many of us will go home and lie to our families and friends. We just can't help ourselves.

You may say to yourself today that Joseph's brothers' lies turned into something good in the end so why should we worry? Joseph even came to that same conclusion in today's reading from Genesis. The fact is that Joseph's 11 brothers had lied to their father and when discovered they were shamed. The other fact is that God would have found another way for the promise to live on. There would have been another way for the family of Jacob to be fed. In fact, one might argue that the famine was caused by God to reunite the family and bring healing to relationships established on lies. When the truth comes out and lies are exposed the possibility for healing and mending of relationships is present.