

A Psychologist's Perspective on the Story of Joseph and His Brothers - Wanda Malcolm

I am familiar, both from study and clinical practice, with the ways in which we learn patterns of behavior from our parents and in turn pass them on to our children. Sometimes those patterns constitute healthy dispositions to act in positive, even virtuous ways; other times they are dysfunctional. As I read the story of Joseph and his brothers, I see the transmission of destructive patterns of competition and deception from parents to children. Jacob was steeped in habits of deception and trickery, and he married two sisters who spent their lives hurtfully competing with one another and attempting to manipulate circumstances to their advantage. By the time we get to chapter 37 of Genesis, Jacob had alienated most of his sons by openly favoring Rachel's son and deepened the rift between brothers by giving 17 year-old Joseph the task of checking up on his older brothers. He added insult to injury by making and bestowing a beautiful and richly ornamented robe on his favorite child.

Like a typical teenager, Joseph lived as if he was invincible. He was likely aware that his brothers were schooled in the art of vicious and cunning retaliation (you can read, in Genesis 34, what

his brothers did to the family of the man who raped their sister). Even so, under the illusion that he was secure in his father's favor Joseph set off without concern for his own safety to check up on a group of men who already hated him, oblivious to the in-your-face arrogance of trekking through the desert in a robe more suited to pomp and ceremony than sheep-herding. And, if the beautiful robe and role as family spy were not enough, Joseph had the audacity to tell his brothers about a dream in which they all bowed down to him. Even his ever indulgent father rebuked him when he recounted a dream in which the whole family bowed down to him.

To observe that Joseph seemed to think he was safe from his brothers' murderous tempers is not to suggest that he caused or was responsible for his brothers' behavior. To say that they were acting out an extreme

version of what had been modeled for them is not to blame the parents, nor does it condone or excuse the brothers' actions. At best it reminds us that, despite being members of God's chosen people, these men were not immune to the patterns of dysfunction that had been passed down from one generation to the next.

Between the time his brothers physically assaulted and sold him as a slave, and the time they were on their faces in front of him, Joseph matured from an arrogant adolescent into a man of wisdom with the whole power of Egypt behind him; a maturity forged in the crucible of seeing God work in his life without rescuing him from slavery or sparing him the experience of being imprisoned without a trial.

Should this paradox of blessing in the midst of suffering be a comfort to those of us who read his

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This Wednesday @ Wycliffe

4:45 p.m. - Holy Eucharist
Preacher/Celebrant -

The Rt. Rev. Victoria Matthews

6:00 p.m. - Community Dinner

Editorial (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

story? Yes... and no. There can be comfort in reading that “the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did” (Gen 39:23), and certainly there is poetic justice in the fulfillment of Joseph’s prophetic dreams. Even so, this story is thoroughly disquieting. Like many of our own traumatic experiences, Joseph’s life reverberates with a very disturbing question: “Why is it that God’s blessings so often go hand in hand with suffering?” Furthermore, Joseph’s was a severe mercy; he never did fully regain his freedom (he did have to petition for permission to bury his father). In fact, the ultimate restoration of communion between Joseph and his brothers meant that his brothers took a share of the consequences of their actions – they too lost their freedom to come and go as they pleased (Pharaoh insured their return from their homeland after their father’s burial by keeping their children and herds in Egypt). In fact, the first few verses of Exodus tell us that the family as a whole eventually became an oppressed and enslaved nation that was not lead out of Egypt until Moses arrived on the scene some 400 years later.

Confronted by the sight of his brothers “bowed down to him with their faces to the ground” (Gen 42:6), Joseph laid out a series of harrowing tests that, with the travel back and forth between Canaan and Egypt, probably spanned more than two years. His actions could be taken as an

exercise in protracted, exquisite and masterful vengeance, or they could be seen as tests his brothers were meant to pass without repeating the past. And his brothers did pass the tests; they showed him that somehow, in the intervening years they had been changed into men who could tolerate their father’s favoritism of Rachel’s sons and would plead to be taken as slaves themselves rather than see their father suffer another traumatic loss.

It would be an error to base a model of forgiveness and restoration of communion on such a story, let alone take it as a prescription for how we should behave in response to the traumas we experience. We simply are not going to find ourselves unrecognizable to the perpetrators of our suffering the way Joseph was, nor are those who hurt us likely to be completely at our mercy the way Joseph’s brothers were. Nonetheless, there are some things we can learn from the story of Joseph and his brothers. For example:

- We are reminded by Scriptural narratives like this that God’s people are not immune to bad behavior. This leaves us with the task of working against the danger on one hand of getting stuck in the nightmare of what others have done to us, and the danger on the other hand of conveniently excising from our life stories the wrongs we ourselves have committed.

- The inclusion in Scripture of the story of Joseph’s forgiveness and restoration of communion with his brothers insured that

both the offense and transcendence of the offense would be remembered for all time. This runs contrary to the view that God expects us to “forgive and forget.” It may be that forgiveness allows us to remember the past without perpetually reliving it.

- It is possible (though not inevitable or easy) to find grace and healing in the difficult task of discovering and narrating the faithfulness of God in the midst of our suffering.

- While we may choose to forgive unconditionally, restoring communion may legitimately involve testing, repeatedly if necessary, the wisdom and safety of re-entering relationship.

- Forgiveness and restoration of communion unfold after an offense has ended, not while it is still happening.

- The process of forgiveness and restoring communion may take much, much longer than we would like. It was over 20 years after he was sold as a slave that Joseph overheard his brothers’ conversation and learned that they regretted what they had done to him; a bit of eavesdropping that permitted the restoration of communion.

Forgiveness cannot undo the past, and cannot remove irreparable consequences, but it does create the possibility of a future that transcends the past rather than one that is defined by it.

Regardless of which comes first forgiveness and repentance are both invitations to restoring communion

with God and with one another

*The Wycliffe Community is invited to an
end of the term,
final Community Eucharist,
in thanksgiving for the ministry of
The Rt. Rev. Victoria Matthews
to Wycliffe College
and to the Anglican Church of Canada*

Wednesday, April 9

4:45 p.m.

Community Dinner will follow.

*This is our chance to thank Victoria for her
presence among us this term and to send her off
to the Anglican church of New Zealand,
where she will assume the position of Bishop of
Christ Church at the end of the summer.*

Bishop Victoria will preach and celebrate.

*Come say thank you and blessing on your new
ministry*

When the going gets tough, the tough...

go to Chapel. Daily Morning and Evening Prayer have been extended through the end of exam week. There will be prayers at each Office for those who teach and those who take exams and write final papers.

See you there.

Annette Brownlee, Chaplain

Congratulations! Class of 2008!

Convocation

Monday, May 12, 2008

3:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist

The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls will preach & celebrate

7:30 p.m. Convocation Hall, University of Toronto

Address: The Most Rev. Paul Kwong
Hong Kong

Wycliffe will honour - The Most. Rev. Paul Kwong, the Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls, the Rev. Andrew Stirling and Graham Kendrick with honorary degrees

All are welcome! Come out and support our graduating class.



BURSARIES 2008-09
 The applications for the
 2008-2009 academic year
 are now available at the Front
 Desk.

The **deadline for first consideration** for a
 bursary granted by Wycliffe College is
April 11, 2008

Thereafter, applications will be considered
 by money available may be limited. Please
 turn in the completed application to Peter
 Patterson's mailbox at the Front Desk.

Please direct any questions to
 Barbara Jenkins, Rm #107

ATTENTION: BASIC DEGREE STUDENTS

**Requests for Extension of Course Work
 Completion**

Students are expected to complete all course
 work by the end of the term. In exceptional
 circumstances, with the written permission of the
 instructor, an extension may be granted. If you
 are in need of an assignment extension for a
 course this semester, you must complete an SDF
 form (SDF = standing deferred) by **Thursday,
 April 10**. The form can be downloaded from our
 website. Look under "Current Students" and then
 "Registrar's Office". It is also available from my
 office. Please note that one percentage point per
 day will be deducted on the course grade if an
 extension has not been requested by the April 10
 deadline.

Marie Soderlund, Registrar

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Wycliffe College is seeking to fill the position of:

Residence Don

A full job description is available from Room 107

The successful applicant reporting to Rev. Dr. Merv Mercer, will live in the Wycliffe residence. (an Apartment is available for someone who is presently living outside the residence.) The position is open August 1, 2008 and the applicant must be able to serve a minimum of two years.

Remuneration dependant on qualifications.

Please forward your résumé and a letter expressing why you should be considered by April 15th to:

Peter Patterson, Wycliffe College, 5 Hoskin Avenue, Toronto ON M5S 1H7
 fax: 416-946-3545



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY! The Front Desk is looking for people to work starting in May for the summer. If you are interested, please speak to Lida to find out more!

A Few Term-End Words - Jonathan Crane

There was a great Kenya night this past Thursday with Swahili prayer and song by our own George Sumner; a good spread of tasty Kenyan fare - mashed plantains, Ugali (boiled cornmeal), beans + corn, chai and more; a rousing microfinancing game; and authentic Kenyan decorations. Thanks to all who came and all who helped! We raised some \$200 for the Church Army. If you'd like another chance to donate, we'll make a call at this week's Wednesday community dinner.

Thank you to all who have been praying for Kenya with the Missions Committee this term. We trust that God's work is being done. Keep the country in mind throughout the summer and keep yourself informed. If you're around Wycliffe for the next few years, keep your eyes open for when the school plans a Kenya trip and consider going. Also, be on the look out for more Wycliffe missions next fall.

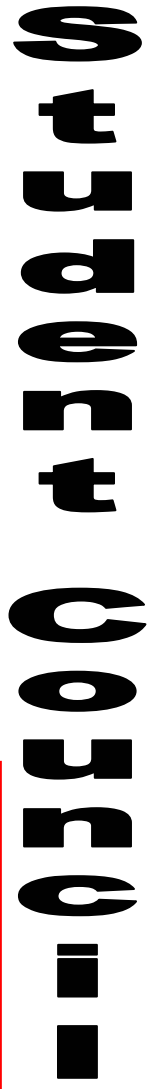
Especial and hearty thanks to Wycliffe's faithful missions committee: Christine Curley, Dave Turner, Dane Neufeld, Rebecca Paulsen, John Stewart, Dick Black; and to all who have helped with missions things this year (World Vision in the fall, Kenya in the winter.) God Bless and have a great summer.

Have a great summer!

<u>Student Council 2008-09</u>	
Senior Student	Chelsy Stevens
VP Theology	Ryan Paulsen
VP Spirituality	Chris Roth
Treasurer	Rich Clark
Secretary	Christine Curley
Social Rep	David Turner
Sport Rep	Dane Neufeld
Day Student	Melissa Graham
2nd Year Rep	Adam O'Brien
Missions Rep	Jon Crane

1st Year Rep and House Advocate positions will be elected in September.

Attention all Wycliffe Residents!
 Next year's House Advocate position is open and available. Duties include representing residents to Student Council and planning activities for the residents. If you or someone you know may be able to fulfill this role, keep it in mind for next year. Talk amongst yourselves for someone who will represent you.



APRIL 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
6	7	8	9 FINAL EUCCHARIST & COMMUNITY DINNER	10 SDF submission deadline	11	12