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 Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
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Jesus Says to Love WHO?

I just love the cartoon that's in your bulletins this morning. The one where Jesus says: Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you!

And a woman sitting there says to her neighbor, "Certainly he doesn't mean the Romans." And the neighbor says, "I hope not."

Lutheran professor Barbara Lundblad tells about driving past a church sign on her commute to work: "Following Jesus is Loving and Practical"

"I don't think so" Professor Lundblad says. "Following Jesus may be loving but it's surely not very practical."

Then she made a list of the impractical things God calls us to do, through Jesus and number one on the list is: *love your enemies*.

In our first Bible reading from Genesis today we have the story of Joseph...

Now Joseph, you'll remember, was kind of a brat.

And he made enemies of his brothers.

His father had two wives, first Leah and then Rachel, and *Rachel* was the younger one his father loved most.

And while Leah had had baby after baby, trying to earn the love of her husband,

Rachel, beloved, beautiful Rachel, year after year had no children until finally she gave birth, oh joy, a little boy, Joseph.

Little, baby Joseph. Spoiled baby Joseph. Joseph who one day when the weather was chilly was suddenly spotted walking around with a gorgeous, latest fashion, embroidered coat which his doting Dad had given him. Ten older brothers looked on... ten older brothers had never gotten a coat from Dad...

Have you ever known someone like Joseph?

Tattle tale Joseph. One day when Joseph was in his teens, he'd been sent to help his big brothers mind the sheep, the brothers maybe were a little lackadaisical as young guys can be... and guess who runs home to squeal on them, Joseph.

And then Joseph started having those dreams. Which he should have kept to himself but he couldn't resist.

Hey, Listen to this dream I had, We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it. What do you think of that dream?

And they hated him.

Listen I had another dream and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me...

That dream didn't go down so well either with his now enemy brothers.

Who are the enemies in *your* life today?

The brothers come this close to killing Joseph outright, but settled for selling him into slavery, for a tidy profit of 20 silver shekels.

Then they take that fancy embroidered coat and dip it into some goat blood, and tell old Dad that his favorite son has been killed by a wolf or a lion...

It broke their father's heart.

Enemies are *often* the people closest to us. The poison started in Genesis with brothers Cain and Abel, it continued through the human line down through Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, and now here is Joseph, pitted against his ten older brothers. And Joseph loses.

Years pass. Joseph gets a good job – for a slave – amazingly he rises through the ranks in Pharaoh's household... eventually Joseph becomes the CFO of the wealth of Egypt,

When famine strikes the whole Middle East, Look here! Hard times bring the ten old brothers a-knocking on Pharaoh's door because guess who's cornered the market and got the only grain for countries around – Pharaoh of Egypt, with his crack administrator, Joseph.

When the ten brothers arrive they don't recognize their obnoxious little brother. Joseph has grown into a businessman, he's acquired an Egyptian name, wears Egyptian clothes, speaks through an interpreter as if he can't even understand these rough guys from Canaan.

But actually, Joseph recognizes *them*, and understands every word they say.

Joseph plays with them -- He hasn't lost all his bratty ways. He hasn't gotten over what they did to him, yet. He hasn't forgiven them yet. Pastor Wayne (Rev. Wayne Nieminen, Ph.D.) says, "Forgiveness often takes place in stages. Joseph isn't there yet."

At one point Joseph has his staff hide his royal silver cup inside the bag of the brother #11, his only full brother, Benjamin, and Joseph threatens to keep the little "thief" Benjamin as a slave in Egypt and send the ten older brothers home to their old Dad to tell him not only Joseph but now his precious Benjamin is lost, too.

The brothers still haven't a clue who Joseph is and they are beside themselves; they know if they don't come back with Benjamin, it will kill their father.

And now we come to today's reading from Genesis chapter 45. Joseph can't stand it any more. The day of forgiveness has finally come. He reveals who he really is, and he says these amazing words, to those who have been his worst enemies:

Don't be so hard on yourselves. It wasn't you who sent me here, it was God. There was a bigger plan, so that when this great famine came, there would be food for you and our old father, and little brother, Benjamin. And then Joseph invited the whole family to come to Egypt so he can share all his fabulous wealth with them.

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My friend Marla, with a Ph.D. in History, a superbly qualified and committed professor with a great track record in Lutheran colleges and overseas mission work, was dropped by her employer after four years of working in a difficult, overseas situation. Here she is, in her early 50's, and she's currently living & doing research in Mexico spending her small savings. I thought she would be livid, as I would be if I were in her situation – I'd be angry at God and angry at the church college bureaucracy. But instead, this week we got an email from her where she simply says:

"It's all a little unsettling – don't know where I'll be living come summer ... but I'm gratefully upheld by the sermons of Padre Josue at the church here in San Miguel. He consistently reminds us that God is in the process of "embroidering" us and will make us blossom at the right time."

Love your enemy says Jesus. Luke 6:27 And in case we didn't hear it once, he repeats himself just a few sentences later in verse 35, *Love your enemies.*

Then he ties together God's commandments and promises:

- *do not judge, and you won't be judged,*
- *do not condemn and you won't be condemned,*
- *forgive, and you will be forgiven,*
- *(and finally,) give and it will be given to you.*

I don't know, maybe in a way this teaching of Jesus is very practical after all.

We have a God who's much bigger than our grievances.

Through the life and teachings and death and ultimate triumph of his beloved son Jesus,
God embroiders a new life for us.

God makes it possible for us to unload the very real burden of griefs and grudges, we bear.

Christ not only commands us, but makes it possible for us to love our enemies,
To do good to those who have wronged us.

And give generously to brothers and sisters and fathers in need, even if they have in no way
earned it...

because that's what our brother Jesus first does for us.

AMEN