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Two Brothers

I heard this story from Marcus Leifert who heard it from Joel Ben Izzy who heard it from another storyteller who heard it from another back further than anybody can remember.

Once upon a time there was a people called Jebusites. They lived in the Middle East in the area where we now find Jerusalem. But this was thousands of years ago before there were any cities or towns there – just fields and hills and farms.

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, there was a Jebusite wheat farmer who had two sons. He loved them both. So when he died, rather than leave all his land to the eldest son, he left it to both of them to share together.

The two had a lot of brotherly love. So they were happy to farm the land together. The younger brother got married and eventually had three children. The elder never married and was content to live alone. Each built a home for himself on the land, but they tended the crops as a team and shared everything together . . .

... until they got into a quarrel. They argued and pointed fingers and yelled. It was a terrible fight. And at the end of the day, each stomped off into his own home and slammed the door.

The next day, they wouldn't speak to each other. One of the brothers went to the front of the land and began to build a fence. The other brother went to the back of the land and began to build a fence. They built a fence right down through the middle of the land, dividing it in half without ever saying a word to each other.

Each continued to farm on his half of the land without saying a peep to the other.

And do you know what they were fighting about? ...

I don't either. No one can remember. It was one of those fights where the fact that each thought he was right and the other was wrong was all they could remember though they couldn't remember what each was right or wrong about.

And they didn't speak to each other.

Late the next Fall when the harvest was in, each had a big pile of grain they had harvested from his half of the land.

The elder brother woke up in the dark of the night and thought, "We each have a pile of grain that's the same size. This really isn't fair. My brother has a wife and three children to care for while I only have me. He needs more grain than I do to feed his larger family."

So the elder brother got up in the dark of the night, filled a basket of wheat from his pile, snuck over the fence and emptied the basket on his brother's pile. Then he snuck back home and crawled into bed.

As it happened, just as he was falling back to sleep, the younger brother woke up and thought, "We each have a pile of grain that's the same size. This really isn't fair. When I get old, I'll have my children to take care of me. But when he gets old, he has no one to take care of him. So he needs more grain than I so he can save up and live in dignity in his old age."

So what do you think the younger brother did?

He crawled out of bed, found a basket, filled it with wheat from his own pile, snuck over the fence and emptied it on his big brothers pile. Then he snuck back home, crawled into bed and went to sleep.

In the morning sunlight, each noticed that their two piles of wheat were the same size. This was puzzling. But they didn't speak about it because they weren't talking to each other.

That night, the older brother lay in his bed thinking, "Well, maybe one basket of wheat was not so much after all. I couldn't even see the difference. One basket isn't much help. So maybe I should give him a large sack of wheat."

He got out of bed and found a large sack. It took him a while to fill it from his pile. But he did. And when it was full, it was so heavy he could barely lift it. He dragged the sack to the fence, lifted the bag over, dragged it to his brother's pile of wheat and emptied it. Then he snuck back home and crawled into bed feeling better about it.

And just as he was falling to sleep, the younger brother woke up and thought, "Maybe one basket of wheat was not so generous. It didn't make any real difference. I'll give my brother a whole sack of wheat."

And like his brother had done earlier, he got up, filled a sack from his own pile, dragged it to his brother's pile and emptied its contents. Then he snuck home.

And what do you think happened the next day?

That's right, they each saw that the two piles were the same size. But they

didn't say anything to each other because they weren't on speaking terms.

The next night, both brothers woke up thinking, "Maybe I'm not so generous. A whole sack doesn't seem to make that much difference. I'll give my brother a wheelbarrow full."

And each got up, spent a long time filling a wheelbarrow and snuck as quietly as he could to the fence. But there they each saw the other with their wheelbarrows so full.

Instantly they understood what had happened and began to laugh. They hugged each other.

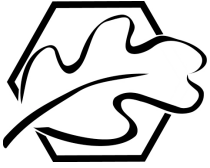
And the next day, they each went out and tore down the fence. And for the rest of their lives, they farmed the land together as two brothers living together in peace.

When the Jesubite neighbors heard the story, they called the field "The Jesubite Field of Peace." In their language, the word for "peace" was "salaam." So it became known as "The Field of Salaam."

And as the years went by a small town grew up in the middle of The Field of Salaam. It became known as "The Jesubite Town of Salaam."

And as the centuries went by, the town grew into a small city. The word for "city" in their ancient tongue was "ur." So it became known as the "Jesubite City of Peace" or the "Jesubite Ur of Salaam" or more simply "Jerusalem."

Throughout the ages, there have been other quarrels around the City of Peace. Some fights were not very nice. But with all our help, remembering the generosity of the two brothers, perhaps someday soon Jerusalem there will truly be the Jer-ur-salaam – the city of peace.



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Community

This is Thanksgiving Sunday. Tradition has it that diverse communities – Pilgrims and Native Americans – came together in a larger community feast. It's a time when many of us gather our extended family communities.

So this morning I'd like us to reflect on community. And to set a context, I invite you to reflect on two questions:

If you have been in our congregational community for a while or could imagine wanting to stay for a while, what would draw you in more deeply? And what might make you drift away?

We first learn about community in our families. What they gave us or didn't give us helps shape how we might answer these questions.

When I was growing up, I felt invisible. I had a place in my family: the second son. But who I was underneath, what I valued, what inspired me or what I yearned for were of no interest. To this day, if I talk about my inner life, my brothers and sister give me blank stares and change the subject. They are good people. But who I am underneath doesn't raise their curiosity or interest.

I've mentioned this to a number of you. About a third of you smiled, nodded your head and said, "Yes, that's very familiar. That's how my family relates to me." So I know I'm not alone in this. And I know there are many of you who do feel seen. We're not all the same in this.

Love and Wholeness

Carl Jung was a student of Sigmund Freud. He had an interesting description of love:

All of us have parts of ourselves that we have trouble accepting. Our family histories play a big role in this. Other life experiences also play a big role.

Sometimes we meet a person or group who explicitly or implicitly accepts some aspects of us that we don't fully accept. In their presence, we feel more accepted and whole. This wholeness is called "love."

It's not something we feel *from* someone else as much as a way *we feel our wholeness*. The other person serves as a catalyst for our feeling complete. But the feeling of love is one of being more open to all that we are.

When we come into community, we may be looking for that experience of wholeness. We may expect it or not. We may have high hopes or little hope. But we'd all like it. Deep down we all want it.

So here I am, someone who grew up feeling invisible. Now I have a job that requires me to stand up in front of a community – a kind of extended family – and talk about what I find most valuable.

Do you think that's a coincidence? Probably not.

All of Us

If we had the time to go around the congregation and hear from everyone about their family histories, we'd hear lots of interesting stories I'm sure.

Probably anything any of us have experienced has been experienced by someone – probably many – in their own way. And there are many who have had experienced the opposite:

- I bet there are many of you who have families that don't ask you much about yourself. And there are many who feel their family's interest.

- There are many who have people with serious debilitating diseases or have concerns about alcohol or drugs. And many with relatively healthy family members.

- There are many who have kids in trouble and may not know what to do about it. And there are many with kids who are doing well.

- There are many who have been hit very hard by the recession and are trying to figure out how to get through. And there are many who are getting by okay.

- There are many who feel lonely. Many who feel connected. And many who feel both.

How it all comes together in each of us is unique. The total impact of our families and life histories and how we dealt with all of it, is different for each of us.

Observations

Let me offer three observations:

1. No community is perfect for everyone. We in this congregation deeply aspire to welcoming everybody. But we can't do it perfectly because what each of us needs to feel whole varies.

2. As we become more accepting of all that we are – our warts as well as our beauty, our neurosis as well as our wisdom, our fear as well as our love, our tears as well as our laughter – we feel whole, loved and loving with less regard for how other people regard us. The more accepting we are of ourselves, the less we

require of other people in order to feel whole.

This is what individual spiritual work is about – seeing ourselves as we are and accepting ourselves as we are.

Communities can help us. Families, extended families and communities can help us become more self-accepting if we're able to embody the love they give us.

3. It is deeply human to want to help others. The one instinct we all have which I don't think ever goes away no matter how enlightened we become is the need to be of some use to others. The open heart naturally wants to help others. So ultimately community is a place where we can give back a little something. This helps us feel more complete.

No, this is not an early pitch for our stewardship drive – that won't be coming for a few months. But it could be.

In the puzzle we worked out with the children earlier, the secret of creating community was finding how each supports the other.

In the story of the two brothers, what broke their long feud and reunited them was the urge to help the other.

To feel truly a part of a larger community, the heart flows outward in many different meaningful ways.

Again:

- No community is perfect for everyone because everyone is different.

- The more accepting we are of all our ourselves, including our dark side, the less we need from others in order to feel love.

- The urge to help others is a deep human instinct that never goes away. To feel whole we need to find ways to give back that feel natural to us.

So:

*If you have been here for a while or could
imagine wanting to stay involved for a while,
what would draw you in more deeply?*

And what might make you drift away?

What helps your heart flow out to others?

... <Congregational responses> ...

Closing

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

*To laugh often and love much,
To win the respect of intelligent people
and affection of children,*

*To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends,
To appreciate beauty,
To find the best in others,
To leave the world a little better whether by
a healthy child,
a garden patch,
or a redeemed social condition,
To know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived,
This is to have succeeded.*