Genesis Sermon Series (19)

**“Toward Reconciliation & Forgiveness”**

Genesis 33:1-11 / May 8, 2022

 **Introduction**

 Professor Craig Kinsley's team from the Department of Neuroscience at the University of Richmond studied ‘the effects of being a mother on women.’ The researchers analyzed the brains of mothers before and after childbirth, and found that many parts of the brain had changes in shape and size. What's interesting is that mothers who gave birth had become braver than ever before, moved five times faster than usual to feed and protect their children, and had improved spatial perception.

 According to Dr. Kinsley, “During pregnancy, a woman can be mentally drained by the burden of being a mother, but when it comes to giving birth and breastfeeding, the cells in the brain area responsible for mental power grow surprisingly large, boosting memory, deepening attention, and acting agile.” He says that a woman who has given birth to a baby has a reorganized brain that develops a strong maternal love, which gives her the ability to cope well with the new demands she has to face.

 Shakespeare once said, “Women are weak, but mothers are strong.” While we wouldn’t agree these days with the first part of ‘women are weak,’ the second part of ‘mothers are strong’ seems to be scientifically supported. Our mothers are by no means perfect as human beings, but when it comes to loving their children, they are often close to perfection. Mothers are sometimes clumsy in conveying love, and hurt their children in the process of raising them, but there is no doubt that they are the people who love us most in the world. I extend my deepest love and gratitude to all mothers in the world. Happy Mother's Day!

 Today is Mother's Day, but I will continue the Genesis Sermon Series. After crossing the Jabbok River, Jacob saw his brother Esau approaching him with four hundred men. Jacob bowed down to the ground seven times before his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. It was a reunion after 21 years of running away from his older brother. Jacob introduced his family to his brother and gave him a herd of livestock as a gift.

 Interestingly, no matter how much we look at Today’s text, it does not explain how reconciliation and forgiveness were made between the two brothers. I can't find a clue for the reason why reconciliation and forgiveness suddenly occurred between the two. The text simply shows that reconciliation and forgiveness had been achieved. In other words, the text is not interested in explaining how reconciliation and forgiveness occur, but it tries to show what happens when reconciliation and forgiveness occur. Today, we are going to explore the spiritual meaning of Jacob’s dramatic encounter with Esau.

 **When Reconciliation & Forgiveness Occur**

 As we go through life, we find ourselves in circumstances where we become uncomfortable with someone or become enemies with them. It could be someone who is an outer circle of our acquaintances, but it could also be a person we are very close to or a family member. In such cases, we live by pretending to be fine. In reality, however, we just live without reconciliation and without forgiveness.

 So what happens when we truly reconcile and forgive someone? In other words, what is the ‘sign’ or ‘evidence’ that appears when you truly reconcile and forgive someone? Today's text explains well what happens when reconciliation and forgiveness occur. What happens to us when true reconciliation and forgiveness take place?

 **First**, there is no need for words. In Today’s text, Jacob did not ask Esau to forgive him, nor did Esau say that he would forgive him. The text describes that as soon as the two met, no matter who came first, they just hugged and kissed each other, and wept. In fact, conflicts, distrust, or resentment that arise between people cannot be resolved with ‘words, logic, and explanation’. No matter how convincingly explained in words, conflicts between people cannot be resolved. Language and logic are useful tools for explaining things, but they are not very effective at solving problems of reconciliation and forgiveness.

 **Second**, what happens to us when reconciliation and forgiveness occur? ‘To be’ becomes more important than ‘to have.’ For 21 years, Jacob had a large herd of cattle and many workers. After enduring all kinds of hardships for the sake of becoming rich, Jacob finally achieved his goal. However, while returning to his hometown, he realized that his fortune was of little importance as long as he remained enemies with his older brother. Finally, after a reunion with his older brother who accepted him without a word, Jacob truly realized that it was more important to be in relationship with his brother than to have many possessions, or ‘to be’ rather than ‘to have.’

 **Third**, what happens to us when reconciliation and forgiveness occur? we can see the face of God in the other’s face. Moved by his brother's unconditional forgiveness, Jacob said, **“For to see your face is like seeing the face of God.”** This was not just an exaggeration but the truth to Jacob. When we unconditionally forgive someone who has sinned against us, our face appears like the face of God. Because the heart that forgives someone is the heart that resembles God’s the most. Jacob saw it in Esau’s face at that moment. That was true. When true reconciliation and forgiveness take place, we can find the face of God in each other.

 **Toward Reconciliation & Forgiveness**

 Then how can we truly reconcile and forgive? First of all, we need to know that reconciliation and forgiveness cannot be achieved through human will and effort alone. Because reconciliation and forgiveness belong to God fundamentally. If that’s the case, what can we do for reconciliation and forgiveness? We must lay our own selves down, so that God can work in us, and let God rule over us. Think of what happened before Jacob and Esau were dramatically reconciled and forgave each other.

 While wrestling with an angel at the Jabbok River, ‘Jacob’, who had lived his whole life deceiving others, “grasping other’s heels” so to say, was transformed into ‘Israel,’ who was a being that was ruled by God. Jacob, who lived with his own thoughts, plans, and ambitions, died in the Jabbok River and was reborn as a being ruled by God. Now the one who ruled Jacob was not Jacob himself but God. Therefore, the event of reconciliation and forgiveness between Jacob and Esau was not done by Jacob and Esau, but by God in them.

 Reconciliation and forgiveness are not what we do, but what God in us does. So what we have to do is to let God be in us and to allow God to rule over us. What we have to do is to stop living as ‘Jacob’ and decide to live as ‘Israel.’ This is what we should do. Therefore, when you want to be reconciled to someone, and when you forgive someone who has sinned against you, do not try to do it in your own mind and will. Let God in you do it. Just allow God to rule over you.

 At the beginning of today's sermon, I introduced the scientific basis for the saying, “Mothers are strong.” When I read about the miraculous phenomenon of a woman, who is biologically weaker than that of men, giving birth to a child and suddenly developing a much stronger potential than that of men, I suddenly thought of this. ‘Maybe God created mothers to lay down themselves while raising their children and have God’s power and God’s heart.’ Maybe mothers are not ‘Jacob’ but ‘Israel.’

 Just think about it. If there is love that resembles God the most in this world, it would be the love of a mother. Our mothers do not love with words. They give their children endless love and forgiveness without words. Our mothers value their children more than their possessions. They are willing to pay any price for their children. Our mothers treat their children as if they had seen the face of God in their faces. Mother are always ready to reconcile and forgive their children. Because God rules over them.

 Dear friends, are you unable to reconcile with someone? Are you unable to forgive someone? If so, it means that you have not yet allowed God to rule over you. It means that you are still living as Jacob, not Israel. If you really want to reconcile with and forgive someone, don't try to do it yourself, just let God in you do it. All you have to do is to allow God to rule over you. Let's live in Israel, not Jacob!