

Dear Friends,

Genesis 44: 18-34

Many years ago, Joseph's brothers took Joseph and separated him from them. They sold him into slavery while they went free. Now, Joseph has recreated that story. He is threatening to separate Benjamin from them, take him into slavery and let the rest of them go free. Will they allow this to happen as they once made it happen, or this time will they act differently?

It is at this point that Judah drew near, came close to Joseph. This is a moment of grace. The rest of the brothers and Joseph have been distant from each other. They have needed to draw near, to come close. In making this move Judah gives an example of what it is to speak peaceably. You will remember how the story began with Joseph's brothers not being able to speak peaceably to Joseph. Well now, at last, we get some peaceable speaking.

Judah speaks peaceably by showing empathy. He is able to take notice of someone else's suffering and to feel it with them. He talks of his father, Jacob. The terrible sadness and grief that he feels because he thinks that Joseph is dead, a sadness that would be completely overwhelming if Benjamin were to be lost as well. In this Judah shows how much he has changed. When they threw Joseph into the pit, he had been able to ignore Joseph's suffering, to ignore his shouts for help. It had been his idea to sell Joseph into slavery. All that has gone. Now he shows empathy.

Judah speaks peaceably by showing generous love. Joseph is threatening to take Benjamin as his slave, while the others go free. Judah could think. That's okay. That's a relief. As long as it's not me that's going to be a slave. He could only think of number one. But he doesn't. Instead he says, "Take me instead. I will take Benjamin's place. I will be your slave. But please let Benjamin go free". Joseph learns from this that they are not going to treat Benjamin, his mother Rachel's one other child, in the way they treated him. They have changed.

Judah also speaks peaceably by telling the truth. He opens up and shares what is in his heart. He talks of his fear of seeing the suffering of his father. Behind that he is revealing his pain and guilt at what Jacob has been going through. Judah's words are honest words, he admits his feelings.

Judah speaks peaceably to Joseph. He draws close to him and gives him what is in his heart. How will Joseph respond? What are his intentions? Will he now take revenge for what his brothers did to him or can he respond to Judah's drawing near by coming close to them himself?

God bless you,

Tony