

"Love Lets the Ledger of Life Stay Unbalanced." – June 25, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

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Genesis 45:1-15 and St. Luke 6:27-38

Is the adage true: "If a person is unkind to you does that unpleasantness return to that mean person somehow, some day?" Is the opposite true? If you are compassionate, sharing all you have, "*Giving up your body to the flames*," as St. Paul says, does this come back to you? Does what goes around really come around?

The story of Jacob and Esau, twins born to Rebekah and Jacob, with Esau being the eldest named Red or flushed, and Jacob whose name means trickster or heel, whose lifestyle reveals that he becomes more of a heel than we could ever invent, speaks to this question. Jacob deceived both his brother and his father: his brother out of his birthright and his father out of a blessing.

Time passes, and Jacob has twelve sons of which Joseph is the favored one. Jacob gives Joseph a beautiful, multicolored coat. A chip off the block, Joseph is unbearable. He chooses a day to visit his brother out in the fields, and starts to brag about his visions and his 'special' position with their father.

The brothers, toiling in the hot sun, have had enough. They fly into a rage and pummel Joseph until he bleeds, placing blood on the glorious coat, and throwing him into a pit, they sell him into slavery. They take the bloody coat to their father. Jacob sees the evidence that Joseph is dead and he weeps. Jacob, the trickster, is now tricked by his sons; Joseph is yet alive.

Years go by. In a great reversal of fortunes, Joseph moves from slave to prisoner, prisoner to Prime Minister of Egypt. A famine develops in Canaan, and Joseph's brothers go to Egypt for food. They do not recognize their prime minister brother. Clearing the room, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. Terror strikes the hearts of his brothers. Can you see them wiggling of the floor, pleading for their

guilt-riddled lives? Why the anxiety? Because "what goes around comes around." Joseph, however, does not desire revenge, nor the punishment they deserve. He says in verse 20: "*Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, to preserve a numerous people.*"

This is not the way of the world. The world says, "*If you do good to me then I will do good to you.*" And, the opposite is true, too. But, God calls us to something more. In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus asks us not to judge others. Jesus goes to the cross understanding that what goes around comes around. He gets that. He sees that how we judge others is often the brutal way we are judged.

One of the reasons Jesus died for you, me, and the world, is because life is vicious, and has a 'get even' dimension to it. If this goes unchallenged, there is the possibility that we become bitter, cynical, score-keeping people. St. Paul, writing to the cynically divided church in Corinth, says that love keeps no record of wrongs. Someone said it this way: "*Love lets the ledger of life stay unbalanced.*" Perfect! There is always a ledger in this world: the good, the bad, the ugly, and the lovely. Love says, "*I will leave the ledger unbalanced.*"

Jesus shares that there is an alternate way to live. This is the way of submission: our will to the will of God. When we do this, we are given something from God that is not hard wired in our DNA: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What follows this? The Holy Spirit comes to live in us. God's grace is weightier than our fragile understanding of justice. This grace empowers us to reply to another's insensitivity, not with thoughtlessness, but with loveliness. In Jesus, we find the extraordinary power to return another's anger with what this person needs most: grace. It is this love that allows us to see people not as black or white, poor or wealthy, uneducated or educated. Rather, we see others as those for whom Jesus died; people Jesus loves; those created in God's image.

Life would be so delightful if, in giving love and grace, we would receive the same in return. But this not the story of Jesus. For Jesus gave both extravagantly, and we know what happened to him.

What if our insults, our insensitivities, ours sins come back around? If you tremble at this thought, then you understand why you and I need a Savior. Alleluia. Amen