

## **An Angry Nation Struggling to Forgive (Genesis 45:1-15)**

*Johan Robyn – Counselor bei der Outreach Foundation in Hilbrow/Südafrika*

### **Introduction**

I was introduced to Nelson Mandela, through a story, which my parents were telling around a fire. I vividly remember sharing about Mandela that he was detained on Robben Island by the apartheid government and no one knows how he looked like. In 1964, Mandela with other accused was charged with treason and sentenced to life imprisonment to Robben Island. When I went to high school, a teacher showed us a sketch how he might have looked like. At that stage in 1987, no photos of Mandela were allowed, no political material was allowed. Our teachers gave us banned books, copies of banned newspapers and also information about the ANC (African National Congress) to read. In those days the country was on fire, I remember how many times our exams in school were interrupted, how children were shot, killed and community members vanished, all in the name of Mandela. On 11 February 1990, it was then when the world saw him and I was finally able to put the story, the sketch and to the completed puzzle of Nelson Mandela together.

### **Long live the spirit of Nelson Mandela**

During 2003 xenophobia attacks in Johannesburg, the whole world witnessed the angry response of a hostile nation towards fellow brothers and sisters from other African countries. I am reminded of the gruesome photo of the Mozambican foreign national that was necklaced, burned to death with helpless policemen trying to save his life. It was these attacks that politically highlighted again the anger and unforgiveness of our beloved country South Africa.

Today in 2017 high levels of unemployment, uncontrollable lawlessness, crime and corruption have changed the narrative of former president Nelson Mandela. It was Nelson Mandela that in his whole being embraced forgiveness and who on the day of his release from prison on 11 February 1992 introduced the world, after 27 years in prison to forgiveness. Today 2017 as a South-Africa in turmoil searching for a the deeper meaning of forgiveness I want to reflect on Nelson Mandela`s forgiveness and the meaning of it especially when we are celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday after his passing.

Unresolved anger leads to bitterness, hostility, mistrust and in most cases revenge. Believe me for Nelson Mandela being kept in prison for 27 years has brought enough bitterness, hostility, mistrust and revenge on him, but the day he put his foot outside of prison he spoke forgiveness.

Similar to Joseph, in Genesis 45, the years Joseph spent in slavery and prison brought enough bitterness on him to not forgive his brothers for what they have done to him. Even worse was the anger that Joseph did not display against God, for allowing this to happen with him.

Read Genesis 45: 1-15 Joseph had enough reason to be angry at his brothers; the story of Joseph is filled with pain, deceit, jealousy and also lies. In Genesis 45: 1-28 it is how Joseph responds to those lies, not through revenge but rather through reconciliation. I remember the day when Nelson Mandela was released from prison the whole world gathered around TV`s and along the road. For the non-whites in South Africa it was a joyous occasion but for white people it was also a time of fear and uncertainty.

I remember on national TV and newspaper reports about white people's fear and how they were stocking up food and preparing for war unknown of what might come of the future. I also remember Nelson Mandela's first public speech he made on the day of his release, it almost similar to that of a Joseph in verse *Genesis 45: 4* .....*"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!*

*"Friends, comrades and fellow South-Africans. I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all!" (page 555 Long Walk to Freedom Nelson Mandela 1994)*

It is here in Chapter 45 that there is a genuine yearning for reconciliation, a Joseph reaching out to his brothers, a Nelson Mandela reaching out to his brothers and sisters black and white, rich and poor sharing forgiveness. For Joseph reconciliation was achieved through his sincerity and forgiveness of his brothers for the evil they have done to him and for Nelson Mandela, his first public words were forgiveness against the evil of apartheid.

Forgiveness is a vital part of the Christian experience, Forgiveness is necessary in terms of our relationship with God and also our fellow brothers and sisters. *In Mathew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*

Forgiveness is also an essential part of our responsibility toward others, both friends and enemies.

Joseph in *Genesis 45:1-15* could not control himself, and he wept so loudly that even the household of Pharaoh heard of it. This were tears of joy to be reunited with his family. Then in verse 3, he revealed himself, *"I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"* but his brothers could not answer, for they were dismayed at his presence. At this stage, Joseph requested them to come closer, so close that they could touch him. It is in coming closer to the person that you offended that you can truly forgive. It is in coming closer to the person that you have offended that you can truly see the character of forgiveness in a person. And that it was what Nelson Mandela said to white South-Africa, come closer so that you can touch me and see that I have forgiven you.

It is also at this point, where his brothers are awaiting a verdict from Joseph. Just for a moment put yourself in their feet, at first in *Chapter 43:32-44: 1* they had been treated graciously by Joseph, given the hospitality of his home, provided with enough provisions for their families back home in Canaan. Then they were stopped and searched, each of them being found with money in their sack and Benjamin with Joseph's cup in his possession (*44:6-13*) They acknowledged their guilt and all were willing to remain Joseph's slaves, but Joseph in light of forgiveness refused to detain any except Benjamin, the guilty one (*44:14-17*). At this point without knowing who Joseph really was, they are awaiting his verdict, and his verdict was not revenge but forgiveness. His verdict was not hatred but forgiveness, his verdict was not throwing them in prison but forgiveness.

Nelson Mandela's verdict over apartheid South-Africa was forgiveness. Just imagine how Nelson Mandela's words of forgiveness changed the country's narrative from revenge to forgiveness. It this sense of forgiveness which is desperately and urgently needed today not just in South Africa but also in Africa. It is in Africa today that we are confronted with modern slavery in Libya as a means of migrant entry into Europe, it is today in post-liberation Zimbabwe where the army peacefully dethroned Robert Mugabe to make way for a new freedom of oppression, it is today in South-Sudan, the Darfur region where one of the world's biggest humanitarian crises because of unforgiveness and war created the world's biggest refugee camp. And it is with this in mind that Africa needs that spirit

of forgiveness and reconciliation which was so graciously demonstrated by Nelson Mandela the day he walked out of prison.

Joseph`s words were filled with hope, forgiveness and reconciliation. In verses 5-8 Joseph assured his brothers that their wrongdoing was actually in God`s purpose. *“You sold me,”* Joseph said *“but God sent me”* (verse 5). Their purpose was to destroy, but God`s was to save. The apartheid government tend to destroy but God tend to repair South Africa. It is this spirit of forgiveness that can repair today the moral fibre of our society that is slowly being teared apart by corruption, state capture and greed.

## Conclusion

Is forgiveness between black and white South-Africans really possible after more than two decades of democracy? Nelson Mandela`s act of forgiveness was not cheap, Joseph`s intimate quiet moment of reaching out his hand of forgiveness to his brothers was not cheap. As we are on the eve of Nelson Mandela`s 100<sup>th</sup> year old birthday celebration, it is important that we as a nation do not make his hand of forgives cheap but rather every day in our search for meaning, stretched out to one another. That morning of 5 December 2013 when I heard of passing I lit a candle, hosted the South-African flag outside of my house because I knew that the forgiveness and hope hi represented came to completion and now it lives in men.

*“I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.”*

**Nelson Mandela** (Long Walk to Freedom, 1994)

Amandla Awethu

## John 13:34-45

*Ann Mokhine – Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche im Südlichen Afrika - Natal-Transvaal - ELKSA (NT),  
Prädikantin und Mitglied des Church Council*

Prayer

Heavenly Father I turn to you and lay down my sin and guilt at your feet. I beg you to forgive me and pray that you will transform my life so that I will live as a new person. Amen

John Chapter 13 verse 34-35 (New International Version)

*“A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”.*

The statement of the new commandment by Jesus in John 13 verse 34-35 was after the last supper and after the departure of Judas.

In the Upper room on the night Jesus was betrayed, He demonstrated His great love for the disciples by washing their feet. After that, He drove the point home that if He the Lord and teacher can wash their feet, they also ought to wash one another's feet.

The command is new because it renews us, makes us new creatures and makes us heirs of a covenant. The commandment was new in the sense that the love was to be exercised towards others not because they belonged to the same nation but because they belonged to Christ and the love of Christ, which the disciples had seen, would be a testimony to the world. According to the Bible, it was given as an instruction to his disciple.

Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment, to love one another as he has loved them. This new commandment is similar to the command to love one's neighbour as oneself, but it differs in two ways. First, the new commandment does not focus on the love people have for themselves but on the love, they receive from Christ. The love Jesus gives becomes the source and standard for Christian love. Second, the new commandment speaks of loving one another, emphasizing the mutual quality of love. The new commandment is a community-building commandment. As people in the Christian community show love for one another, they express the love they receive from Christ. The way the world comes to know about the love of Christ is through the love that takes shape in Christian communities (13:35).

Jesus commands his followers to love one another, just as he has loved them. If his followers love one another in this way, their relationship to Jesus will be plain to see.

To love one another means we should pray for one another. We should forgive one another. We should sympathize with one another. We should relieve one another's necessities. We should help one another. To love one another means; lay down your lives for each other.

Real love forgets self. Real love knows no danger. Real love does not count the cost. The Song of Solomon 8:7 says: *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.*

This is aimed at the whole Christian family, the whole Church, the whole Country. Unless you love others, you have no love for God. Love is the fulfilling of all the laws. No duty is accepted without love. Love is a symbol of a Christian. Love is an everlasting grace. Christ will judge us according to this command.

We the people of South Africa saw this love in the former President Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela's life was a good example of the life Christ calls us to lead. Nelson Mandela devoted his life to doing what was right. Christ calls on us to remember the prisoners, free the oppressed and care for the sick. Nelson Mandela followed the example of Christ and set an example for us as Christians to follow. He was an example of the words of Christ in John 13:34: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another". The love that he had for others defeated the apartheid regime. The love that he had for others enabled him to forgive his enemies. His life reflected his faith. He spent 27 years in jail but this did not kill the love he had for the people of his country and the world at large. He was even prepared to die for what he believed was the right thing to do. The quote from one of his famous books clearly outlines what he stood for:

*"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, because love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite". (Nelson Mandela, Long Walk To Freedom).*

The late President Nelson Mandela believed in fairness and justice. We are inspired by his values and we honour his legacy. As Christians we ought to obey the commandment that our Lord Jesus Christ and love one another.

May the peace our Lord Jesus Christ that surpasses all our understanding guard our minds and souls.  
Amen.

## Reconciliation: Our Ministry to Both Humanity and Creation (Romans 5:10-11)

*Bischof Emeritus Dr. Ndanganeni P. Phaswana – Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche im Südlichen Afrika (ELKSA)*

ROMANS 5:10-11

*"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*

Salutation

Grace and peace from God our Father through faith in Jesus Christ be with you all! Amen!

The year 2018 marks hundred years since Dr NR Mandela was born. If he were still alive he would be turning 100 years old in July. Tata lived his life to the full and he left a legacy not only for South Africans but the whole world as he was a global icon. As human beings cannot be loved by all because we are not money, he had his own detractors. Madiba, his clan name, showed us a life of humility, inclusivity, and reconciliation without compromising one's quest to be liberated and walk tall under God's sun. Whoever met Madiba will tell you that the man exhibited authority which was not dictatorial. He dwarfed his enemies by being humble but resolute and brutally honest.

New International Version (NIV) Bible explain reconciliation as follows: To reconcile is to put an end to hostility, and theologically, the term is closely related to justification. Paul tells us that God took initiative to reconcile sinful human beings to him through the death of Jesus Christ. In the same vein John tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, (John 1:14).

God, as the Creator, saw the sorry state of affairs humanity was in after the fall and initiated the act of reconciliation. The hostility between humanity and God was so deep that human beings were groaning in darkness and running around like headless chicken. They sold their souls for cheap popularity. They enthroned their "self" in the place of God. Humanity hated God. Humanity hated God's creation as long as it was not benefitting from it. Similarly, humanity hated the negative self-image and projected that to the "other." The "other" can be a person who does not belong to my clan, ethnic group or tribe, race, political party, denomination, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In other words, people who hate others do not love themselves. They may be suffering from low self-esteem. They display insecurity. Braaten and Jenson (Vol.2.1984:65) describe reconciliation as follows:

*"Reconciliation with God can occur only through God's coming to us in Jesus to die and be raised. The necessity for the cross roots in God's decision to be a God of mercy in spite of our bondage and rejection. To be true to that decision, God must come to us and bear the rejection concretely and actually. God's wrath is the obverse side of God's mercy: God will not be known other than as God of mercy. The cross is the price God, in mercy, pays to be concretely for us, to put to death the old and to raise up the new. When faith is created, God has reached the goal and is 'satisfied'."*

Politicians treat this concept differently. They may embrace it on their own terms, which will not undermine their power and grip to the resources. Once political leaders feel their authority slipping

through their fragile fingers, they become dictators and they blame others for their failures. The easiest safety valve is to blame external forces or enemies normally described as foreign agents who are hell bent to initiate regime change. Whoever expresses a different view is easily blended an agent of external forces, which may be a perceived enemy and fake intelligent reports may be fabricated to authenticate their point of view. Apartheid regime is a classical example because it blamed Communism for the cry of the oppressed. The anti-apartheid activists were called agents of either Russia or China. The same could be said about Zimbabwe. Former President of Zimbabwe blamed Britain and USA for his economic woes that befell Zimbabwe. He would not step down from power until he was unceremoniously forced to relinquish power by his own army.

Madiba, as a sign of a secured political leader, laid down the presidency after serving only one term of five years. He did not derive his authority from the position but his reconciled relationship with himself and the whole of humanity and creation as a whole. His identity and or dignity were not anchored on materialism but on his believe in human ability to overcome adversities. Although the apartheid regime had demonized him, he never called for vengeance. The very establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) speaks volume of his desire to build a reconciled community, a non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa.

A person who derives his/her identity and dignity from materialism relates to others on the basis of what he/she would benefit from such relationships. The story is told of two girls who met in the field. One, whom I will call Olga, was from a well to do family. She always dressed "to kill," to use South African township's slang. The second one whom I will call Marry was an orphan staying with her disabled grandmother. Her attire was not impressive at all. That affected her image in the eyes of Olga.

Olga said to Mary: do you see that big house on the hill? It is my father's house. Do you see those cattle grazing down the valley? They are my father's cattle. Do you see those horses drinking water by the lake? They are my father's horses. Olga went on and on pointing at all beautiful assets that gave her a sense of being and belonging.

Mary responded: Do you see the hill on which your father's house is built? That is my father's hill. Do you see the valley in which your father's cattle are grazing? That is my father's valley. Do you see the lake by which your father's horses are drinking? That is my father's lake. Mary went on and on counting all things that belong to her father. She ended up by mentioning that the land itself belong to her father. Olga was disgusted, to say the least. She exploded: If all these things are your father's property, why are you so raggedly dressed? The tone of her voice was scornful. Mary responded calmly but in an assured voice: Olga, you come from your father's house. I am going to my father's house. Mary's identity was secured in God not on perishable material. She was not reconciled with her poverty because she knew that her fate was not sealed but open in God's plan of salvation. Her dignity was anchored on God's image because she is created in God's image. God owns all God created. Human beings are tasked to be good steward of God's creation.

The other story is told of Madiba who walked into his neighbour (white) family unannounced. He knocked at the door, a child peeped through the door's eye, and dashed back to tell her parents that there was a tall man standing at the door. Her father opened the door and behold Mr Madiba was standing at the door. The father recognised Madiba and invited him in for a cup of coffee. The house was filled with joy because Madiba paid them a visit. This is a living act of reconciliation by a man who spent twenty-seven and half years behind bars whose crime was nothing else but to denounce

the evil of apartheid system. He was incarcerated by the white establishment: white only parliament, white police officers, white magistrates, white prosecutors, white judges, white prison warders, white laws, etc. Mandela had all, humanely speaking, reasons to hate white establishment in all its multifaceted manifestations. Amazingly, Mandela related to all South Africans as fellow country persons who should not be judged by what they did under apartheid but by what they would refuse to do in a democratic South Africa.

Reconciliation does not mean condoning hatred, idolatry, exploitation of human beings by other human beings. It does not mean endorsing evil acts but it is a genuine call to *metanoia*- repentance and embracing the path of shalom in its multifacetedness. In addition to what Braaten and Jenson stated, as quoted above, my submission is that reconciliation means confronting evil with good. It means staying secured in the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. It means continuing to bear fruit of Spirit which is but not limited to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, (Gal.5:22-23).

Once reconciled, we are expected to be other-centred and good stewards of God's creation. It means loving people without expecting love back. It also means acceptance of the reality that human life is inextricably linked with created nature. God entrusted the earth to human beings to keep and till it for sustaining human life. Reconciliation opens one's soul's eyes and mind to take cognisance of the fact that *motho ke motho ka batho babangwe - muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu* - I belong, therefore I am.

Madiba's leadership qualities were sharpened by apartheid system. This is the case because the suffering we experience in life should always draw us closer to God and fellow human beings. But it also goes without a doubt that in the same fire gold glitters and straw burns! To some, the same suffering may unleash their most brutal nature they had been covering up under the guise of love and democracy. However, secured and reconciled life should not react to challenges life presents but responds to it. Madiba's afternoon visit to his white neighbour is inspirational to all who aspire to live a reconciled life.

As Christians, we are new creation and we are expected to radiate God's love wherever we are. We are expected to be little "christs"(to paraphrase Martin Luther) to our neighbours. In other words, we are expected to be neighbourly to our neighbours. We are expected to treat foreigners in our midst as we would like them to treat us. This calls upon both foreigners and law officers to correct wrongs with good. We are expected to refrain from enthroning wrong behaviour such as human trafficking and dealing in illegal drugs. Police officers are expected to enforce the laws of the country without fear or favour. They must not be corrupted by drug lords. Again as secured and reconciled citizens of Mzansi we should continue to accompany the oppressed communities in calling and demanding justice as well as their call for peace. This we do not because we are righteous on our own but because of God's grace we are liberated! We are reconciled with God and fellow human beings out of God's mercy. We are to continue to be other-centred!

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end

Amen!