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### **Heart of War heart of Peace?**

Readings Genesis 32:2-31; Mark 10:1-16

Isaac, Jacobs Dad played favourites. His heart was towards Esau. Esau seemed to be the man's man, the hunter, while Jacob seemed to be the entrepreneur, the manager, good at business deals, an intelligent person, mindful of his mother. What a great team the brothers would have made if they could have worked together and pooled their resources. Instead Esau became the ancestor of the Edomite's and Jacob the ancestor of the Israelites. Forever, feuding.

Jacob had a number of dreams. His God moments seem to come through his dreams. And these dreams seem to occur at the extremes of his psychological distress.

In his first dream, remember the ladder to heaven at Bethel, where he was fleeing his twin brother, after stealing Esau's blessing, he received such a word of grace from God. "I am with you and will watch over you. I will be with you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land." He was 17 in the desert, alone in the world.

Even if we are tempted to say he was the master of his own fate....God blessed him.

The reading this morning was the third dream he had by the river Jabbok on the way to Haran. This time he was about 37. Twenty years since he had seen Esau. This was a camel trek with many livestock, women and children from the bottom of Gaza to Haran just inside the Turkish Border. Probably Invercargill to Nelson. Although they only got as far as Shechem and then returned to Bethel.

So here was Jacob again.. too spent to struggle any longer, stripped of his considerable worldly wealth, powerless to control his fate.

The thought of meeting Esau after 20 years, not knowing how he might be received..., As you do you wrestle with yourself, you wrestle with an apology, but some things can't be fixed. And knowing that Esau was not alone, but with 400 men was enough to put fear into anyone's heart. ....Jacob ever the tactician, sent ahead his gifts of livestock, with his family, and the message that these were from Jacob his humble servant.

He has a dream, in it a fierce battle rages... Jacob holds on to his assailant for dear life.... Again, he extracts a blessing from this 'person'. This shadow of himself.

Have you had those dreams?....When there is no escape, For me, usually I would wake up, heart racing, breathing hard, feeling exhausted, and think... Thank God it was only a dream!

So what is it about children and blessings from their parents???

An Individual conflict that became a familial, tribal, national, international conflict.

I wonder how the story might have been if Isaac had seen fit to bless both his sons when they were teens. Both boys being valued by their father, freeing the boys to value each other's very different gifts. What if they had had hearts of peace toward each other.

Isaac, Jacobs father was also rejected by his father in his choice to sacrifice him. So now Jacob and Esau experiences this rejection, Jacobs son Joseph, another one who had God dreams, while not rejected by his father is rejected by his brothers because of his favoured position in the family. What is it with these conflicts that go down the generations.????.... I'm sure you know what I mean.

But maybe the narrative is all leading to the ultimate rejection of a later ancestor. Jesus. And to the historical rejection of the Jews.

How we are treated and how we treat others has far reaching consequences. We do violence whenever we call into question the identity or integrity of the other person. Whenever we minimise their relevance or their legitimacy.

Jesus, valued people, and brought them healing both from their physical... and their mental ailments. He worked miracles..... And when people are valued and respected miracles happen.

Jesus in the Gospels, showed us a new Way of Being in the world. A way... based on our relationships to one another other... and of course our relationship to God. We desire a community that really connects and looks after each other.... We at Knox talk about being inclusive of others.....and it is the longing of our hearts to experience all of this.

If we can change one thing about what we do then we can change an outcome.

Conflict is often about perspective,...we don't always see the many different perspectives on an issue.

What hinders us I think, is that we become driven by a particular need. And Its that need that I want to talk about today. But to understand that need we should go back 70 years to something Martin Buber<sup>1</sup> pointed out. Martin Buber was a Jewish philosopher who died in 1965.

He identified two ways that we approach people you may recall it. The I–THOU relationship or the I – IT relationship. The one is seeing the other... as a person, with the same values that we give ourselves, the same relevance and the same legitimacy. We see them with the same hopes and dreams, and cares and fears.... so I might find myself thinking about them, and honouring them with my thoughts and actions. The other way is seeing others as objects rather than as people.

We see others as objects when the other person's hopes and dreams, cares and fears don't matter to me. When they are obstacles to me reaching my goals. Or they might have expectations I don't want to meet. Or perhaps they are just vehicles to use for my purpose... or perhaps they are just irrelevant to me. Or we might just like them being there, we might just like them as part of the scenery.

We see others as objects as often as we have a need to feel justified, either in our behaviour or in our thinking. That is the need I was talking about before. The need to feel justified with the way we think or behave. Sometimes it is so automatic we are unaware of our justifications.

But feeling justified is a choice....

Whats happening in Gaza, today is a choice. A choice based what? The promise to Abraham repeated in Jacobs dream? I will give your descendants the land.

I was in the Yad Vashem the Jewish holocaust museum in Jerusalem a couple of years ago. If you've been there you'll know it's a pretty horrific place to go through. However there was one puzzling video I watched that was titled "a culture without walls." Actually it was the title of the video that puzzled me. "A culture without walls"!!!!

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<sup>1</sup> Buber, Martin. Between man and man / translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947.

Maybe that was the Jewish dream that one day, the wall that they had built, they would feel safe enough not to need. Unfortunately the danger to their safety is created by their own Government. Since 1948 Israel has made Millions of Palestinians homeless, recently over a thousand dead in Gaza!

The wall that they built is 750 kilometers long and growing. The young 18 and 19 year old teenagers, boys and girls who came down the Isle of our bus going through the check point were real, and so were their m16 machine guns.... they were not plastic water pistols! Although I think in my mind at that moment that's what I wanted to think they were....

Israel makes all their 18 and 19 year old children visit this horrific museum at least 2 times a year to make sure they remember why they should subdue the indigenous people of the land they are occupying. Why would you want to so, traumatise your nations children?

Imagine for a moment if one day you were suddenly removed from your home at gunpoint, with nothing but the keys to your house, never allowed to return. And at that moment you had no legitimacy as a New Zealander. You couldn't access any of the benefits that we take for granted. And at times have no water coming out of your tap to drink or wash, for three months. How would you cope with the sense of injustice!! Especially when on the other side of the wall someone might be enjoying a swim in their pool.

“A land without people, for a people without a land.” It was a justification. This justification was a deceit it was a lie to the world. One which I believed until I saw for myself.

But in the mind of Israel there is total justification for this behaviour.

Because we stayed in the Westbank for the mostpart in solidarity with the Palestinians, I was utterly inspired by their hope and commitment to peace, and I'm sure there are many Israelis too who are absolutely committed to peace, and hate what their Government is doing with American support.

When Jacob finally meets Esau.... Esau grabs Jacob in a bear hug, kisses him, and they both weep. Reconciliation.....But feuds gather momentum and often continue long after the original dispute is resolved.

When you build a wall or put people in boxes you are treating people as objects, not only that...you are inviting them to treat you as an object.

History has witnessed several holocausts if you like. Millions of Africans were killed in the slave trade. Millions of women were killed in the witch hunts and are still killed in domestic violence. Children are traded and killed. When one objectifies the other these things happen. People seen not as human but as chattel, not as free but as commodity, not as person but as object.....

It's about perspective, In the Gospel of Mark we have Jesus challenging the justifications and concept that only women could commit adultery. He was saying men were just as responsible for their behaviour. He also rebuked the disciples over how the children were treated and blessed them.

Its easier to see how this works in the situations I have just described. But how do we see this working in our own day to day interactions with people?

Why does it matter if we feel justified about doing or thinking something? After all we are often right aren't we?

Well, I think we can be right and wrong at the same time.

1. Firstly I believe it matters a whole lot to the other person how we see them. Parents, It matters to your kids how you see them. It matters to kids how their teachers see them. And here in church – It matters to others how you see them. How we see the other person matters a whole lot to them.
2. And secondly it matters tremendously to ourselves how we see other people because this choice like all choices comes with a consequence...a price tag. The price tag can be costly. I know..... and its never worth it!
3. And thirdly, If I choose to see the other person as an object, I purchase a need that I didn't have before. I purchase a need to be justified in the way I then see that person. At this point we enter into a self - deception. We maximise our own virtue in the situation and we minimise the virtue of the other person.

Others are not so different from us. But we end up categorising them in the one way they might be different. And we ignore the many ways that they might be like us. So instead of being people like us they become something other, something other than a person to us.

The Arbinger institute is committed to personal, organisational, and global relationships that stem from a heart of peace.

They invite people to function in all their personal and professional relationships from a 'Way of Being' that is from a 'heart of Peace' instead of a 'heart of War.' The concepts are a Jesus way of Being that permeate the gospels and that brings transformation.

Personal example deleted....

We often move too quickly to find a solution when what is actually really important is the process of getting there.

The Arbinger approach uses the idea of a 'Box' to describe two different 'ways of being' towards others. They suggest that when we have a heart of war towards others we are "In the Box". When we have a heart of peace as our way of being we are "Out of the Box".

So the more justifiably right we feel, the more in the box and wrong we are likely to be. I quote....

*Its not that when were in the box we enjoy problems, far from it. We hate them. In the box it seems like there's nothing we would rather do than be out from under them. But remember when we are in the box, we are self-deceived – we're blind to the truth about others and ourselves.<sup>2</sup>*

They say particularly about leadership that,

*"There's something deeper than behavior that determines our influence on others.... People respond not primarily to what you do but to how you're being – whether you're in or out of the box toward them."*

I said earlier that violence is anything that challenges the identity or integrity, legitimacy or relevance of another person.

Marcus Borg<sup>3</sup> suggests that the mild form of /violence<sup>3</sup> is judgmentalism, insensitivity, self-centeredness; or ordinary self-interest."

To be out of the box we need to listen, we don't need to agree with them but we do need to try and understand their perspective.

Jesus had a listening heart, a heart open to others. A heart open to you and me.

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<sup>2</sup> Arbinger Institute. *Leadership and Self-deception*, 2009. Woodslane Press. Aust p100

See also - Arbinger Institute. *Anatomy of Peace*, 2006. Woodslane Press Aust.

<sup>3</sup> Borg, Marcus. *The Heart of Christianity* 2003, p.153-154

Jesus listened to people with all his senses,. ...Hardly ever just with his ears. Jesus listened with his whole being. He listened with his eyes, he saw Zacheas and heard the cry of his heart. Not just the dude up a tree trying to get a better view!..... Jesus listened with his body..... He felt the touch of his garment, by the woman in a crowd of people crushing around him.

He particularly listened to those who had little, social, political, economic or religious power. The widows, the children, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the mentally and physically ill... women. Others might have seen a prostitute, but Jesus saw a person with needs for acceptance and Grace. [Luke 7:36-] He had a heart of peace toward others even his enemies.

When we feel the need to be defensive or justified in what we are doing or thinking.... We need to remind ourselves that self- deception is just around the corner.