

Genesis 50:15-21

15 Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' ¹⁶So they approached* Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷"Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept,* fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Romans 12:12-21

¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;* do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;* for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Goodness is stronger than evil.

I was working for a delivery company on Varrick Street on Manhattan on the morning of September 11th, 2001. It was a morning like any other morning. Our office was a converted warehouse with no windows and dark walls, so it was kind of like working underground, and the staff would need to take periodic breaks just to get out and get fresh air and sunshine, and I remember one of my phone reps coming in and telling us that a plane had hit one of the twin

towers. I think we all assumed that it was a tragedy but a small incident, like a private plane that went off course or lost control; nothing to fret about – we'd hear a report on it on the evening news. Then came the second collision, and everyone suspected that this was no longer an accident. That was when I went outside to have a look. I remember seeing something I would never forget, watching fire trucks and police cars speeding down Varrick Street. And shock set in to every worker. Our company had regular pickups and deliveries to both towers; we had drivers there at the time of the attacks, none of whom were killed, thank God. I remember I was still dealing with angry customers on the phone who were oblivious to the magnitude of this disaster and wondering why we could not make deliveries there – the police by now had blocked off all of downtown. By early afternoon our office had pretty much shut down as people were pretty much trying to get to their homes – bridges were closed to traffic and this mass exodus was occurring.

And it was then, and there, amidst all the shock and sadness, that I saw the side of Manhattan that I had forgotten ever existed. I saw the side of humanity that we often forget about – the compassion, the generosity, the sacrifice. It wasn't mandated by any government decree – nobody gave the order for the citizens to care and to love and to share; IT JUST HAPPENED. I lived way out in Long Island, so my immediate destination become the closest operating Long Island Railroad Station which was across the Queensboro Bridge, about a hundred blocks from the office, and I remember walking to a bus stop, pulling out my metro card and having the driver tell me, "Today all rides are free." I rode the bus for about 10 blocks, sitting with people who were covered in dust, just looking at the floor. Soon I realize that I would make better time walking, so I got off at the next stop and just starting hiking toward 59th Street with thousands of other people. I remember seeing shop owners handing out bottles of cold water to anyone who was thirsty. I remember just how easy it was to make eye contact with strangers, to offer painful smiles to one another, to strike up conversations, share names and stories and thoughts about this horrible event. I remember receiving the biggest hug from Hyesun and James when I finally did get home. It was the worst day and the best day of my life.

One thing that terrorists don't seem to understand very well, and that is that GOODNESS IS STRONGER THAN EVIL. When hate groups attack the people they choose to hate, it only prompts us to love each other with more intensity and intentionality, to start tending to one another's wounds, to start rebuilding our lives and our homes and our businesses. GOODNESS IS STRONGER THAN EVIL, and that truth is self-evident every time evil manifests itself.

But evil does manifest itself, and sadly it can creep back into our lives so soon after we are drawn together in love and care and compassion. There were a lot of good people doing good things in New York on 9-11 who were scorned and assaulted and accused because of the color of their skin or the God they chose to worship. It wasn't very long after 9-11 that Abu Ghraib Prison gained notoriety as American soldiers tortured and humiliated Iraqi citizens who were guilty of no crime other than being Iraqi citizens. What was the great evil that led to such crimes? Was it nationalism? Perhaps. More specifically I believe it was racism. It was one of those "isms" that informs people that they are better than others and have the right to mock and ridicule and torture and kill whoever is not among their inner circle. It was that kind of "ism"

that brought on Jesus' own death, whether it was the religious authorities who felt threatened and betrayed him to Rome, or whether it was Rome itself that considered Jesus a threat to their own authority. The most innocent person in the world was arrested, tried in a kangaroo court, mocked, spit upon, derided, tortured and killed. Why?

TO PROVE THAT GOODNESS IS STRONGER THAN EVIL. Evil is all about destroying life, not just physical life but spiritual life – to deprive others of their full humanity is to take away life. Jesus not only rose from the grave; he remains the most living thing in the universe when you consider both the physical AND the spiritual side of life. He rose so that we would have life and have it in abundance, both physical and spiritual. THE FULL LIFE is not simply about breathing oxygen but it's also about living into our own potential, living the way God intended us to live – loving one another, healing one another, caring for one another, *sacrificing* for one another, forgiving one another.

And God continues to prove that goodness is stronger than evil; if Jesus was *my* Son and I witnessed what humanity did to him with their whips and their crown of thorns and their mockery and their crucifix, I might unleash all the wrath I could muster against the human race. But what God does instead is forgive, and welcome, and heal, and restore us free of charge. What God *does* is *love us* as is his nature until we are no longer God's enemy.

And the task God has given us is to establish HIS Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven, a kingdom where our enemies are loved to the point where they are no longer our enemies, where we can recognize that the best strategy to end terrorism is not with bombs but with bread, and not by spilling their blood because Christ has already spilt his own blood for our redemption. GOODNESS IS STRONGER THAN EVIL, and as hard as it may be to resist the temptation to fight fire with fire, we are called to be firefighters, to be peace makers, to be the good people God created us to be.