

*CRIBB<S>NOTE – August 10, 2008*

Sometimes siblings can be cruel to each other. We have long memories of events that occurred in our childhood that frame our relationships and behavior toward our sisters, brothers and family.

A few years ago, I was asked to counsel a family facing a crisis that stemmed from the failing health of their mother. Although everyone was an adult and some in the fifth decade of life, they acted like small children vying for their parents' attention. There were unresolved problems long held from their childhood that became magnified in the moment of critical decision-making. They expected me to solve their life-long issues and help them deal with their immediate concerns regarding what they should do about their mother.

They were neither unique nor unusual. Many of us carry deep, negative feelings for years. We may elect to avoid certain relatives because we refuse to forgive or let go whatever hurt they caused. Failure to resolve the matter can create a consuming, emotional deficit.

In the case of Joseph's brothers (Genesis 37), they became homicidal and wanted to eliminate the problem by destroying his life. Joseph was a dreamer. He was handsome and the favorite son of his father. All of that drove his brothers mad; even to the point of murder. They conspired to kill Joseph and conceived a scheme to do the deed with an explanation they could deliver to their father.

They had grown tired of Joseph's grand imagination and dreams that included his brothers and their father bowing down before him. Joseph said in his dreams even the sun, moon and stars bowed down to him. Worse, he wore a beautiful, hand-stitched coat by his father as a special gift for his most-loved child. It was too much. In the minds of his brothers Joseph had to die. So, they plotted to kill him.

The story reminds us of ways people continue to abuse each other. We drain our most precious resources for the purpose of threatening and harming those we deem unworthy to live. We feel justified and unapologetic for what we do.

This past week we commemorated the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. 63 years later, the United States has not apologized or expressed remorse. Instead, a persistent, stubborn sense of justification prevails.

One of the most painful episodes in American history was the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Millions of innocent people were stolen from their African homelands, stripped of their names, languages, cultures, and identities. They were transported across an ocean to foreign places for the single purpose of toiling without compensation.

To this very day, there has not been public apology expressed or reparations extended to persons whose lives have been forever rearranged by the cruel and inhumane treatment of slavery. Instead, a perpetual sense of entitlement and privilege remains ingrained in American society.

The Joseph story is a precursor to modern events that continue to unfold. We have yet to learn the lessons sufficiently to improve the human condition. Many of us believe there is no need to change how we treat other people. We design new ways to hurt and destroy human life and smother the human spirit.

When that family came to my office for help, it was very clear only they could solve their problems and heal their open wounds. We prayed together and listened attentively. Some of them heard each other for the first time. They carried juvenile attitudes for so long they missed the maturity and growth that transformed them into adults. The acknowledgement of suffering and exchange of apology created space for new relationships to begin. Fresh air filled the room.

We can do more as a people and nation. We can do better. There is no need to keep repeating the Joseph story and making life so miserable for others and ourselves.