

## Trusting God's Hawk-like Vision

September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Rev. Emilia G. Halstead

*When Reuben heard the plan, he tried to help Joseph. Reuben said, "Let's not kill him. We don't need to shed any blood to be free of him. Let's just toss him into some pit here in the wilderness. We don't need to lay a hand on him." Reuben thought perhaps he could secretly come back later and get Joseph out of the pit and take him home to their father before any more harm came to him. The brothers agreed. [...]*

*Judah said to his brothers, "What profit will it be for us if we just kill our brother and conceal the crime? Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites instead. We won't have to lay a hand on him then. He is, after all, our brother, our own flesh and blood." The brothers agreed. [...]*

*Joseph said to his brothers, "Don't be afraid. Am I to judge instead of God? It is not my place. Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it only for good, and through me, He preserved the lives of countless people, as He is still doing today. So don't worry. I will provide for you myself—for you and your children." So Joseph reassured them and continued to speak kindly to them.*

*(Genesis 37:21-22, 26-27; 50:19-21)*

Last summer, while I was on sabbatical in Scotland, I spent a day at the southern tip of Loch Lomond. I went there to visit "Sea Life" the Loch Lomond Aquarium. As I walked from the parking lot to the Aquarium, I realized that the whole area was more of a pavilion than I expected, with shops and cafes, AND the Loch Lomond Bird of Prey Centre.

For those who don't know, I am fascinated by all birds of prey, and so even as I walked towards the sea life, I made a promise to myself to split the day and spend half with the birds of prey. Once I got to the Birds of Prey center I watched a demonstration with an owl, and I visited all of the other raptors and then I noticed that they had a demonstration video going in a small learning center. Taking a moment to step out of the drizzling rain, I sat down to enjoy what I thought would be a 10 minute video...

45minutes later – I heard the announcement over the loud speakers that the Center would be closing soon. I panicked because the documentary, which was about the science of hawk-vision, hadn't

finished yet! Yet, I had seen more than enough to experience awe in the gift of sight that God gave to hawks (as well as eagles and owls.) Hawks can see up to 5 times better than a human being. They can see their pray up to half a mile away. And that's with trees, rocks, grasses, and who knows what else, partially blocking the view. Truly amazing.

Another amazing creature, for different reasons, is a sheep. Sheep can see behind themselves, without turning their heads. They have a peripheral vision of 300 degrees! However this wide sideways and backwards vision has two "downsides": First, they have terrible depth perception. Second, they cannot see directly in front of themselves.

So what does the sight of hawks and sheep have to do with our scriptures today? Allow me the use of a metaphor, remembering that metaphors have their limitations: Think of God's sight like that of the Hawk and of human sight like that of a Sheep. There are lots of places that humans are referred to, metaphorically, as sheep in both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.

Take Psalm 23 for example: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lay down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters." We humans have an ultra fascination with what is behind us, and we often have a hard time seeing what's right in front of our noses, just like sheep.

The sections of the story of Joseph that we heard this morning are the sections that reveals what God is able to do with Hawk-like vision, seeing what was possible with the sinful actions of Joseph's brothers, even while they were in the plotting stage of what they would do to Joseph.

God didn't make Joseph's brothers do what they did, in order to get Joseph to Egypt. Rather, God took what the brothers themselves were choosing to do, while they were hyper-focused on their past frustration and anger with Joseph, and gently nudged their actions through the Holy Spirit – first with Ruben, the eldest brother, and then with Judah – to getting Joseph out of immediate danger and onto a path in which he might be able to help God save others.

It is God alone who can see all of the possibilities for how the future might unfold, depending on what each creature in Creation chooses to do. Even down to which flowers a honey bee might decide to visit, and which ones it will choose to fly past. God can see all of the possibilities of how things will move forward in human history, and God is always moving among us as the Holy Spirit, gently nudging us towards the possibilities that will bring Life and Wholeness, both in the present and into the future.

We cannot see or predict the future. We can – and do – make guesses with our sideways and backward vision, but even those guesses are severely limited in their scope. The only way to truly have hope for the future is to place our trust in God's Hawk-like vision, knowing that God is doing all that God can, with the choices we make, “to make us lay down in green pastures and to lead us beside cool waters.”

It is our job to watch for and listen to the guiding of the Holy Spirit, trusting that God will never lead us off a cliff. However, if we choose

to walk off a cliff, ignoring the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God will continue to move in the world – with the long view – and encourage all of Creation to bend towards “God's kingdom come, God's will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.” Amen.