

Today's torah portion is very solid. And it's about Unity. It starts with

Gen 44:18- 47:27

This portion finishes the story of Joseph. Here he decides it's time to tell his brothers who he is and to help them. He sends for his dad and the whole family is joined together again and brought to Egypt to live well through the famine. There is also a list of all the son's and grandsons, listed at the end of the portion.

Ez 37:15-28 is the Haftorah

This is a beautiful passage about G-d's plan to reunite all of Israel and have them live in peace in the country G-d has prepared for them.

There were two portions for Luke, I chose to use the second, Luke 15: 11-24, this covers the story about the prodigal son.

In Genesis I'd like to read 46 2-7

2G-d spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."

3He said, "I am G-d, the G-d of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there.

4"I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."

5Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him.

6They took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him:

7his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

I think the main point here is that G-d has brought Jacobs family back together. A family that has been split for years. G-d is demonstrating his power and control, that following his will for our life will bring about amazing things. Some of which being reuniting a broken family and renewing his promise to make them a great nation. Also that God has not forgotten that he put Jacob in Canaan for a reason, and he will bring them back to their own country.

In Ezekiel I'm going to read 21-22,25-28

21"Say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

22and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

25"They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

26"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

27"My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

28"And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.""

Again God is taking a split country and putting it back together, a broken group of people and bringing peace. His plan and desire is for peace, and he has a way of accomplishing this. I noticed that in both G-d makes promises for the people to live in the land G-d has destined for them. A land of peace and unity.

Yeshua binds this all nicely together in a parable, demonstrating more than just one person but all people.

Luke 15: 24 says:

24for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate.

In all of these the common theme is unity. How G-d makes this possible is by bringing us into community. Yes there are verses in the Bible about family's being torn apart by faith, religion and G-d, but His will is for us to live in community. He's not saying he will tear families apart, just that it will happen. Though as we see here, G-d is capable to bring a brother back to his family after much strife and bitterness. He can take two separate community's that can only see their differences and make them one people, and an example for the rest of the world. That what was lost, can be found, what was dead, can be made whole again.

Now I believe that there are three ways that this unity can be applied to our lives. The spiritual level is the one that affects the whole world. The community level is the one that effects our congregation and the personal level is how each of us as individuals deal with G-d's will for our life.

Spiritual level

In the spiritual level there is a lot going on about unity, so many levels. You can relate the Gentiles and the Jews, the Christians and the messianic believers, different denominations under G-d. Unity has been a big part of G-d's work in this world, when people put aside there difference's and pray together in unity, that is when miracles and revival happen. In school one of the things that stuck out is that at Azusa St. black and white people ministered together. The world was amazed that William Seymour had both groups of people ministering and praying together. He believed that the revival came to Azusa St. because the people were willing to put aside their differences and worship together. When I was in Israel I met many believing Arabs, who ministered and

worshiped with the Jewish believers. They believed that if we could work together there would be better peace in the Middle East. When I was in china it was the same. One of the churches I ministered in was mixed Chines, Phillipino, and English. The community was built on the idea of unity. Humanity has fought to keep walls, barriers and separation for people's differences. Wars are fought over differences, in thought, look, or action. God says we are all made from the same dirt, and our differences are tools we should use to bring peace, not to fight over. Even in this week's passage in Ezekiel "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD" His people, one people. When G-d is in the center of our community that is when things happen.

We as a community have to realize we aren't his only community. I am so proud of all the things we have done this year to reach out to our fellow believers in the UMJC, especially with the floods and tsunami's. The prayers that have gone out for Israel. I pray we continue to remember our sisters and brothers around the world. But how do we do this? As a community.

Community level

The second level is the one closer to home. Our own community, and our responsibility as a community. I know that we have been thought a lot in the last three years, we have grown, and healed, we have had some wonderful times. We are a young community, what are our responsibilities to each other? To the people that want to come into our community? Being in a community is a choice, a choice to follow the community's rules, communicate clearly, respect the people in the community and like any other relationship

it takes time and work. A community is something that has to be built, brought together through the hands of the individuals in the community. There have been, there are and there will always be people in our community that are there for different reasons, on different parts of their path. It can be difficult for a bunch of individuals with their own expectations to come together, but one thing that might help is to remember Romans 15:1-2 where it says.

“1Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just to please ourselves. 2Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.”

An example of this in our community is when we have an oneg and we ask that everyone not bring pork, for the kosher followers. And when we have the L-rd's table we use juice instead of wine for the benefit of those who abstain. The cost of community is personal sacrifice, while within the community, that benefits the entire community.

We are all on a path trying to find where we fit, and what our strengths are, the hard part of a community is giving people the space, acceptance and time to master those differences. Then to use these differences to strengthen the community, not break it.

Ezekiel again says “ Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and they will no longer be divided.” We were not meant to stand a lone.

G-d has called us together, but to do that we have to choose to work together in Unity.

Personal level

This brings me to the third level, the personal one. As I've already said this is a choice.

Sometimes its not an easy one, the hard part is that for any of this to work, each person of

their own free will has to decide that G-d's will for their life is more important than the individual things that happen to each of us. Let me take you back to Joseph in our torah portion. Think about what he went through. As a young man he knew what his life was going to be like, he had dreamed it, in his heart G-d had placed a dream for his future, and though his brothers rejected it, sold him to slavery and everything else that dream still tugged at his heart. What's your dream? Is your path clear or has it been so long, has life taken you so far you have given up on it? G-d's timing, G-d's plan will play out, if you're faithful to him. Joseph always took what was given him and put his best into it, trusted G-d and kept plugging along, with the dream in his heart tugging every now and then. Joseph followed G-d well, met his dream and was able to forgive his brothers, as they learnt to respect him. His words in Genesis are

“Gen 45:5,7-8 5"Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

7"God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.

8"Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

What are your actions on your path to your dreams, how do you treat others along the way. G-d's call is to unity, even Joseph was reunited with his father after all the years. In this world, in this community, in your life, in this new year, what are the choices you and I have to make for G-d's plan in my life.

Who is your favorite person in the Bible and why? I would guess it's because of the decisions they made. Recently mine has been Mary, I think of how her life changed, with the announcement from an angel about her son's birth. She was happily on her way to being married, what were her thoughts, was she expecting children soon, was she worried about raising them. What about when she held that baby in her arms, I know all Jewish moms think their boys are perfect, but Mary had to deal with wondering if she was ever going to correct him when she shouldn't or just watch when she should stick up for him. Every day there would have been decisions about raising the son of G-d. I respect her for her decision to put G-d's plan for her life first, and follow her son. Was that her dream? How did G-d meet her faithful choices?

In this new year there are many resolutions, to loose wait, to eat better, to budget well, to stop smoking. I'm going to let you know what mine is. This year, I want to put G-d's will first, I chose to follow his path for my life, and will strive for G-d's unity in my life. I hope that out of all the possible resolutions, you decide to put G-d first too.

I'd like to close with Ezekiel 37:14 "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land, then you shall know that I, the L-rd, have spoken it and performed it."

Let G-d place you in the land, the community he has for you. But most of all choose to take his spirit, and LIVE!

I'd like us all to pray, I'm going to play a song, please pray and think. Then we will have the L-rd's Table.

1 Cor 11:23-26 "The Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."