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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 27, 2020
17th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Romans 14:5-9; Matthew 18:21-35

Hymns: 24; 27; 412; 453:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, ¹⁷ 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." ' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

¹⁸ Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we *are* your servants."

¹⁹ Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. ²¹ Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Family feud!

No, not the game show, the real thing. That is exactly what had afflicted the family in our text, and it wasn't something new starting with that generation. Jacob and Esau had each been a favorite of a different parent, Jacob being favored by his mother Rebecca, while Esau was Isaac's favorite. The favoritism in that family had caused a severe rift so that Jacob had to run for his life, and he never saw his dear mother again before her death. So sad how the devil can sow the seeds of envy and hatred within even a God-fearing family.

One would think that Jacob would have learned and not repeated the mistakes of his parents, but that isn't the way of human nature. He favored his wife Rachel over her older sister who was less attractive, his wife Leah. As a result of this he loved Rachel's two sons Joseph and Benjamin more than his other sons. And that favoritism was resented, openly resented. When Joseph shared his dreams with the rest of his family, dreams in which the rest of them including his parents would bow before him, that resentment flowered into hatred which brought forth the fruit of grievous sin. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. One wonders if there weren't thoughts of how that fixed him and his dreams!

Well, they didn't think about a couple things. They didn't consider how much their moment of retribution for Joseph's perceived arrogance would impact and grieve their father; and of course, they didn't realize how the Lord remains in charge of all the circumstances in our lives to bring the outcome He desires.

Our text takes us forward many years. Joseph is Prime Minister, a powerful prime minister over all of Egypt. All of the descendants of Jacob, later known as the children of Israel, lived under Joseph's protection and care in Egypt. Their father, Jacob, has died.

The situation begs the question: What were the brother's going to experience at the hand of this mighty ruler, Joseph? Was it going to be retaliation? They lived in terrible dread of what Joseph might do. They knew he had great power. They had seen and even experienced Joseph's immense power. What they were to experience was --

THEME: The Grace of Forgiveness.

It is important that we remember that true forgiveness is not something that naturally flows from the heart of man. When we do our best at forgiveness it remains a struggle for us as long as we have our old adam within us. Even when we are so sure that we have forgiven, even a dearly loved one, we will find that certain transgressions have a way of popping up in our remembrance and impacting not only our feelings, but our words, our tone of voice, and yes, our actions, even when much time has passed. It is then that we need to forgive again, to forgive again from the heart. To forgive from a transformed heart. True forgiveness comes by grace, not by merit. It is a kindness that rules over the situation, especially when it is not deserved. So the Spirit would lead us to understand how this grace of forgiveness is a power –

I. Liberating Sinners from the Burden of Guilt.

Guilt is a burden that weighs heavily upon people. It impacts the conscience and weighs heavily upon the soul, but it even impacts one's physical well-being. Remember David's confession, "*When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long.⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.*" (Psalm 32:3-4) While living in impenitence over his sin of adultery and then murder, trying to deny the presence of guilt, guilt weighed heavily upon David both physically and spiritually.

So it was with Joseph's brothers. Maybe they already knew the expression, "Revenge is a dish best served cold!" Joseph had already assured them of his forgiveness long before Jacob their father's death. He had cared for them and their families. He had given them choice land in which to live and tend their flocks and herds. He had provided for them generously. But the burden of guilt raised its ugly head at the time of Jacob's death, and the brother's feared that it was only for the sake of their father that Joseph had tolerated them and been kind to them. They questioned if Joseph had truly forgiven them. This all came out of their sense and burden of guilt, and not from anything Joseph had said or done.

The lesson we draw from this is important to our relationship with others whether they be family, fellow Christians, or even chance acquaintances or strangers. When others sin against us and we have forgiven them, because of the nature of the old adam within all of us, not only will we find some recurring resentment that we need to weed out of our hearts, but those whom we have forgiven will experience that welling up of the burden of guilt that may impact their attitude toward us. It may be necessary to assure others of forgiveness as much as it is necessary for us to address the spirit of forgiveness within our own hearts. We will always and only find forgiveness --

II. Flowing from Faith in a Merciful God.

Let's review this touching scene of humble confession and full assurance of forgiveness. It begins with Joseph's brothers saying:

Genesis 50:17-21 “ ‘Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.’ And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we *are* your servants.’ ¹⁹ Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. ²¹ Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”

We see more than fear in the brothers' approach to Joseph. We see genuine humility and contrition. They pleaded for forgiveness and bowed before Joseph, faces to the ground. They put themselves at Joseph's mercy. They acknowledged themselves to be Joseph's servants. The word is a strong one. They said, “We are your *slaves*.”

This tore at Joseph's heart. He wept as his brothers spoke to him. He didn't desire their pain. He didn't see that it was his place to bring down vengeance upon them. Anybody from the world would have! Joseph had the political power to condemn them all to slavery or even death! Joseph knew that was not what he ought to

do. Why? Because he was not in the place of God. By faith Joseph understood the words Paul would write centuries later regarding the things that happen in this life, words with which we are familiar. *“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28) Yes, even when people sin against us, sin grievously, sin so that we suffer, God is still present with us and will turn that which is evil for our good and blessing. And note how Joseph understood that this good and blessing extended to many others. Yes, they meant evil against him, but God used it for good so that many people’s lives would be saved. Many of these people were Joseph’s relatives who became the nation from which Jesus OUR Savior would be born! That is exactly how far God brought good out of the evil men did. And it is what the Lord does again and again, turning the evil that men do even to His children so that it serves for the advancement of His kingdom and the spread of the gospel for the salvation of souls.

Secondly, Joseph understood that vengeance isn’t left to God’s children, but reserved for God Himself alone. Again consider these words of Paul written to the Romans and how they reflect Joseph’s faith in action. *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.* ²⁰ *Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”* ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* (Romans 12:19-21)

This is faith’s response to sins against us. Joseph endured a great deal because of his brothers’ cruelty toward him, but he also comprehended the mercies of God that the Lord had brought to him as well as many others. He knew God’s grace and love. He knew the faithfulness of a loving and forgiving God. This was the faith that guided and directed Joseph in all his ways, and led to the grace of forgiveness in Joseph’s dealings with his brothers. Joseph overcame evil with good. He assured his brothers that he would continue to provide for their needs and those of their children after them. Joseph comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

What an example of faith for us to follow in our Christian walk! The overriding truth governing our lives is that we are children of

a merciful God who has not and does not deal with us according to our sins, but according to His grace. That means that He forgives us fully and freely not because of anything we have done to earn or deserve it, but because of His grace in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 1:7) He sent His only begotten Son into the world to bear our sin in His own body, so that now *there is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 8:1)

In the parable we read in our gospel lesson this morning we should identify ourselves with the servant who owed our Master the King, the most holy God, the ten thousand talents, an impossible debt to even to begin to repay. Our debt, that massive debt of sin, has been forgiven. That is the extent of the grace of God toward us, and His mercies are new every morning. His loving kindness toward you and me knows no end!

How do we respond? Well, we all pray the words of the psalmist, “*Oh, give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever!*” (Psalm 107:1) And that is a good beginning, but then we carry that expression of faith and gratitude into our life and dealings with others including forgiving others as Jesus has forgiven us. We forgive fully and freely, as Joseph forgave his brothers, overcoming evil with good! Yes, that will be like heaping coals of fire on their mind and heart. And that will also serve as a clear testimony of the gospel that may well lead others to know Jesus as **their** Savior, and Lord of their lives. And that is the greatest way good overcomes evil!

Of course we daren’t think for a moment that this will be easy or that we will find the strength within ourselves to accomplish such grace in our lives. It calls for steadfast diet of the gospel, and a great deal of heartfelt prayer for the Spirit to strengthen us that we might serve as lights of the gospel in a sin darkened world. It is what Jesus taught us to pray for in the fifth petition, “*And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*”

“Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore,
Remove from us their burden sore,
As we their trespasses forgive
Who by offenses us do grieve.
Thus let us dwell in charity

And serve our brother willingly.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 458:6)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.