**“Forgiveness Finished”**

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Genesis 50:15-21

John 19:30

Lenten Midweek Maundy Thursday

**SERMON READING** Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he **comforted them and spoke kindly to them**.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

All Scripture is (what’s called) breathed out by God. It is all useful. All Scripture is true. And, yet, all Scripture is **not equal**. God’s Word about itself is that it’s a “lamp to our feet and a light to our path”; and **some of those words shine brighter than others**. Some provide clarity greater than others and more comfort than others. It’s hard to imagine doing without certain sections of Scripture. What would Christmas be like without the angels’ singing, “Glory to God in the highest”? And what would Easter be like without the angel’s announcement that “He is risen”? And what would these next 24 hours be remembered like without that great **summation of the Word of Christ from the cross that “It is finished”**?

Heaven and hell hung in the balance on that one. Upon that one little phrase from the parched lips of our dying Lord: “It is finished” everything cosmic hinged. Famous last words they were. Without them, we might be left to wonder if sin is completely paid for? Is our salvation won … and fully? Or is there something else and more that we need to do to **seal it**?” With those words, we know for sure.

**WITH THE WORDS, “IT IS FINISHED”,**

**WE CAN TAKE COMFORT IN OUR SALVATION.**

We can be confident. It is finished! All that condemns us before that, God in Christ Jesus answered-for by His bloody sacrifice of Himself. “With His wounds we **are**, then, really **healed**”. “The Father **laid on Him** **(done deal)** the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

**1**

As much as we’ve been drawing similarities with Joseph’s story these past weeks, **here’s** where we’re parting ways with it a bit. Joseph’s brothers never had **that kind of total clarity (so comfort) regarding the forgiveness of their sins**. The jealous brothers had conspired to murder and, instead, sold him to slave traders (to make some money from him) instead. These siblings connived a story for dad that his son was dead (mauled by an animal). But as we observed this family, we noticed Joseph’s life led by God with, then, a happy ending with Joseph saving this whole family from famine and forgiving the sins of the brothers. It **should have been** a only-happy ending for those saved and forgiven.

But the text says that Joseph’s brothers **doubted his stated forgiveness**. They assumed that it might have an expiration date—**UNREASONABLE**.

So, 17 years later (on the occasion of their father, Jacob’s, death), they felt sure that Joseph’s forgiving words would be withdrawn. Joseph’s brothers **dreaded all over again**, having **never really stopped**. They thought their father’s death might surely mean their own. Joseph surely had only been merciful **for his father’s sake**. Now he’d get revenge without having to hurt his dad by it: **“It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him”**. Now the way was clear for Joseph to dole out his retribution. They’d **get, now, what they deserved**.

It’s hard not to feel **some sympathy** for the brothers of Joseph. We can **identify**. Guilty ourselves of many things, we have shame to pay for. We sin and our jealousies and hatreds aren’t so different than theirs (maybe less graphic, but regular enough). One sin breaks them all and maybe our darkest ones will “come to light” at some point. And we know the pain of a conscience that (no matter what) still relentlessly reminds us of our sins and makes our hearts heavy **even when** told we’re forgiven.

Joseph’s troubled brothers decided to **act** **upon** their doubt and fears: they manufactured a dying wish of their father—a “message” that wasn’t truly asked for yet **made up** to, hopefully, beg them some security. And (for good measure) they fell on their knees to do it, declaring: “Behold, we are your servants”. And with those words, we can see where they went wrong seeking mercy. With the words, “We are your servants”, the brothers bargained (hoped for a “**deal**”) tried to engineer something that could only be freely given. Which may be something we’ve tried (vowing to do better and make ourselves worthy of the debt that we owe), bargaining (like the prodigal son who’d planned to ask his father to take him back as a **hired hand**), thinking **we can clean up our own messes, and earn grace**.

**2**

But Joseph had none of it. Observe and rejoice in the source of forgiveness: “Am I in the place of God?” Joseph’s forgiveness **was** God’s. It is God’s will to forgive, so **from Him**. By faith, Joseph just saw what his brothers couldn’t: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” What Joseph’s brothers intended in evil, God (**by gracious forgiveness**) meant for good—so that **many lives would be saved**.

Can you begin to comprehend the wonder of the words of Joseph’s mouth? Can you **dare to believe** the divine will Joseph speaks that’s Good News to sinners: “God absolves your sins, my brothers” … he announced it? Could it **be** that all the evil of this world that we’ve, also, adopted **God would take to His own hands and then redirect it for good?** Can you **see what Joseph saw: that behind the horrible sins of his brothers, God worked for Good?**

That **News (that Good News)** is never depicted and declared as plain and directly as it was remembered on Good Friday. On **that day**, God’s Good overcame the evils of men and Satan. **See** the crucifixion and **see** forgiveness, then, plainly. In **that sight**, **THERE** you’ll **begin to believe the Good News of the Gospel**. Men intended the cross for evil, wanted the Son of God killed by their hands and out of the way. They lied to try to make it happen. They gave false testimony. They perverted justice to engineer this. They compounded evil upon evil directed at the Son of God. And it was **bloody** evil … which God used for Good (for your Good) to save you and this whole world and to open the kingdom of God and heaven to all of us who believe.

“It **is finished**!” Every sin committed **against you** and **by you** was atoned for by the death of Jesus. Every sin committed any direction is atoned for / paid for in the death of God’s Son. “It is finished!” “In Christ God **was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them**”. In Christ, God was **working all things out for the eternal Good of you and me and all people**. Sin and evil does not get the last word where humanity is concerned. Jesus does. And our Lord’s last word was: “It **is finished**!” **Receive it!**

**Receive** it and **believe it**. Don’t let a guilty conscience deceive you into doubting God’s full pardon and forgiveness. How could we deny what the Lord God won for us from such a things as the cross? Are **we in the place of God?** Yet God in Christ Jesus **took our place** and **bore our griefs** and **carried our sorrows** to the cross. “It **is finished**!” ….

In Joseph’s last documented interaction with his brothers, there’s the moving and tender scene that, you know, over-rode everything else that ever happened with them. His eyes wet with tears, he **gave his brothers the comfort and clarity that they craved**. “Do not fear; I will provide for you and for your little ones’, thus comforting them and speaking kindly to them” even after the death of their father. Joseph **DEMONSTRATED** by **word and action** his love and affection by the ongoing care of his family. Joseph wanted to remove all doubts in his brothers and let them **receive and enjoy forgiveness**.

The Lord does that for you. Through **His Word and actions**, He forgives your sins promises the sufficiency of that forgiveness, loving you and caring for you, speaking tenderly with you. Jesus aims at removing doubt by His last words from the cross. **“It is finished”**, then He gave up His Spirit in death. Moments later, a soldier’s spear pierced His side and, at once, blood and water poured that still pour out for you and I, and remember that water washed us in Baptism and blood is served from a cup into our bodies still plagued by too much guilt for sin. In that water and blood forgiveness of it is given. God’s always wanted us to be clear on it / comforted by it / receiving it with confidence for a peace that passes all understanding. **Let there** **be no doubt**. “It **is finished!**” Amen.