

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
February 23-24, 2019  
Epiphany: Year C: Luke 6:27-38  
Pr Ruth Ann Loughry

God's grace and peace be with you – today and always. Amen

Remember the story of Joseph that was our first lesson tonight? We only heard a few verses – near the conclusion of the story actually. So let's do a quick review of this powerful story. (Gen 37)

Joseph – born to Jacob and Rachel, was living with his family in Canaan and working as a sheep herder. He was 17 years old. Joseph was a tattletale – he told his dad how his brothers were doing in the fields. He was also a dreamer – he dreamt incredible prophetic dreams; one of which had all his brothers and parents bowing down to him.

None of these things made his brothers enjoy his company, shall we say? His brothers didn't like Joseph. Especially they didn't like Joseph because Joseph was his father's favorite son. Yes, Joseph was the favorite. Remember Joseph's coat of many colors? Jacob, Joseph's dad, had made a coat for his favorite son, to the despise of his brothers. They hated him.

So, one day the brothers conspire to kill Joseph. They would have finished him off had not Reuben (a brother) convinced them to just throw Joseph down into an empty pit. And while they are eating lunch, they see a caravan of Ishmaelites headed towards Egypt. They say to each other, "Why should we try to conceal our brothers' blood? Let's not kill him, let's sell him!"

They do, and off Joseph goes on a caravan to Egypt...sold by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver.

Years later there is famine in the land so that no one has food. But through a fascinating chain of events, Joseph has come to be second-in-command to the Pharaoh in Egypt. He was thirty years old at the time when he came to be in authority in Egypt.

Well, drought and famine were not uncommon. But in the years that Egypt produced food, Joseph made certain that much grain was being stored up all

over the land. He stored up grain in abundance; so much so, that he stopped measuring how much grain was in all the bins. (Gen. 41:49)

This is how his brothers come to be in Joseph's presence. They have come in search of food. He recognizes them – they don't recognize him of course. He gives them some trouble accusing them of being spies but finally he reveals his identity and forgives them. 'Do not be angry with yourselves (for doing what you did to me). God sent me here to save lives – including yours! Go home and bring all your families to Egypt, including our father.'

Joseph forgave his brothers. They tried to kill him, sold him for money and he forgave them. Forgave them. That is the work of God in our hearts.

In Jesus' continuing Sermon on the Plain which we began last week, He says this, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." When you do these things, Jesus says to us, it will be like measuring out grain, like how we might measure flour or brown sugar. If you press it down into a cup, the more you can put into a cup. And then what you'll get is more than you expect. It's a measuring cup of abundance – what we receive back from the Lord is beyond our comprehension. For it is only by God's grace and mercy that we are able to forgive.

Joseph could have thrown his brothers into prison. He could have ruined their lives, like they hoped they were doing to his own. He didn't. And the cycle of violence and distrust and jealousy was broken.

How? How does a cycle get broken? Only by God's Holy Spirit working in our hearts, to help us forgive.

It's difficult for we in this century to hear the words as those in ancient Israel would have. So first off, Jesus is not saying, "Be a doormat." He is not encouraging self-deprecating behavior in front of abusers when we have a right to stand up for ourselves. "Love your enemy. Pray for those abuse you." *Let people walk all over you.* No. That's not it.

He is saying something completely different, in fact.

Jesus is inviting us to a different way of living. He is inviting his hearers into a life of freedom, actually.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. 'Your reward will be great – you will be children of the most high.' These words would have been completely strange to ancient ears. If a person slapped you on the cheek, it was a grave sign of dishonor and disrespect. You could actually take them to court. Thus to turn the other cheek – unthinkable!

As far as giving away a coat or a shirt...people only had one set of clothes, maybe two. Thus to give a shirt away was an incredible sacrifice. No other religion or any philosophy in the Ancient near east had a teaching like this. It was unheard of.

And yet who was it, that in the end was taunted, had his clothes taken from him, and on the cross asked God to forgive his enemies? Jesus is in the forgiving business. He knows how to do it when we cannot.

But Jesus knew that if people acted upon His words, it could stop a cycle.

Let's take forgiveness to think about a cycle. Jesus says, "Forgive and you will be forgiven."

When we've been hurt, an invisible wall goes up between us and the other person, or party. It's a wall of distrust, of anger, or hurt pride, or great sorrow. Forgiveness is not the easiest business by our own human efforts.

Yet forgiveness is a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. As we begin to open our hearts and prepare to let go of the hurt that has wounded us, Jesus and the Holy Spirit come and help us release it. This could happen in the space of an hour or years.

The other person or party might never know that we're trying to forgive them. Yet our hearts get changed. When we try to pray for our enemy, they may continue acting just a poorly, yet we begin to view them differently. As people – who are wounded like we are. Forgiveness is a gift of God through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. That's how a life of freedom in God happens. That's how a cycle can end.

When we forgive, what freedom there is! We are free of that pain, free to either be in relationship again – or not. Free of that wall that was in between our souls.

Joseph forgave. He stopped a cycle that had started with his brothers.

You might remember the movie Schindler's List. Schindler played by Liam Neeson, joins the Nazi party for political expediency as he wants to make a fortune on World War II. He staffs his factory with Jews because they are cheap labor. But over time he sees how they are being treated and killed. His heart begins to soften. And he begins actively to save Jews from the Nazi's. His efforts are successful and over time he fills entire factories with Jews that he intends to save. He bribes officials to save more and more families from the Nazi's. He ends up spending his own fortune.

At the end of the movie, Schindler tells his workers they are now free but that he will be hunted as a war criminal and must flee. When he tells them goodbye, they give him a gold ring made from by a factory worker, engraved with the Talmudic phrase, "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." Schindler breaks down, crying that he could have sacrificed more, saved more lives.

Schindler experienced himself how to stop a cycle of violence, of hatred, how to give a shirt. And what he got back was a measure of grain, pressed down, shaken together, running over and over and over ....perhaps as many as the grains of sand Joseph had saved for his people.

It's worth it. Loving in Jesus' name. Costly, but worth it.  
Amen