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“The Father Forgives Us”
Genesis 50.15; Matthew 18.21-35

Genesis 50.15

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph’s brothers said, “What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?”

Matthew 18.21-35

²¹Then Peter came and said to Jesus, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

*Dear Jesus, do I **have** to forgive?*

*Do I **have** to forgive those who did me wrong?*

Who snubbed me?

Who got mad at me?

Who are saying bad things about me?

Those whom I just do not like?

Our Old Testament lesson this morning (Genesis 50.15-21) is the last chapter in the Joseph story. Joseph’s eleven brothers had been jealous of the favoritism shown him by their father. They decided to kill him, then changed their minds and sold him into slavery. From being first a household slave and then a convict, Joseph rose to become the #2 man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself.

During a great famine that affected the entire region, Joseph's father and brothers left Canaan to search for food in Egypt. Joseph was now in a position to save his family. Joseph's father, his eleven brothers, and their families settle in Egypt, and all is well.

Until.

Until their father dies: "Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?'"

In other words – what if Joseph does not ... **FORGIVE** us?

"What if Joseph does not forgive us?" They way they articulate that is really a paradigm for *un-forgiving*. "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"

They articulate 3 parts to "un-forgiving".

What if Joseph remembers all the wrong that we did to him?

What if Joseph relives what we did to him and bears a grudge?

What if Joseph repays us back in full for what we did to him?

Remembering ... reliving ... repaying: that adds up to "*un-forgiving*".

Remembering. Not just able to recall that on such and such a date at such and such a time so and so said or did something. That is likely to happen – painful events are deeply etched into our memories, and they will bubble up to the surface from time to time.

I mean remembering in a very active sense: dwelling on a hurt, obsessing over it. Having it close at hand, picking it up, going over it, examining every little detail.

Joseph's brothers may have heard his story after they arrived in Egypt. "Why your brother came here as a slave. He was sold to an official named Potiphar. There was some kind of hanky-panky, and he rotted in Pharaoh's prison for 12 years." Twelve years – that's a lot of time to think about and obsess over what landed him there. And it's that kind of remembering that frightens Joseph's brothers.

Reliving. Reliving the hurt, the pain that offense caused you. Feeling it again and again every time you remember the offense. That pumps more power and energy into the memory, making the pain grow.

That's the problem with dragging around a bag of grudges: they always get heavier and heavier.

Repaying. Figuring out a way to settle the score with that person who hurt you. I'm not talking about restitution – a person who has done damage should pay for those damages. Nor am I taking about a person who did something wrong facing the consequences of their actions.

I'm not talking about penalties. I'm talking about payback ... vengeance. Getting a pound of flesh on top of restitution. Making that person suffer making them feel your pain.

Remembering the offense ... reliving the pain ... repaying the hurt. That is the recipe for not forgiving. It is the paradigm for "un-forgiveness".

What if *that* were the paradigm that **God** used with us? To paraphrase Joseph's brothers – "What if **God** still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him? What if **God** did the remembering ... reliving ... repaying????

Remembering all *our* sins. Remembering all the ways we have said "no" to Him. Remembering all the times by our actions or by our inaction we said "Not Your will but my will be done". What if God dwelt on all of the hurt and pain we inflict on one another...obsessed over it.

And then relived all the pain and grief we caused him?

And then decided to repay us in full for all we have done?

Why that would be ... hell.

Thank God that God uses a *different* paradigm. The paradigm of forgiveness. It was articulated at the cross.

Jesus looks at those who have tormented and crucified him. And he looks at all of the rebellion and disobedience of humanity. Past and future, which includes yours and mine.

And Jesus cries out "**Father ... forgive them.**"

And God does.

God hears the cry of His Son.

And forgives us.

That brings us to the Gospel story ... and Peter's question: "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me"

*Dear Jesus, do I **have** to forgive?*

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Jesus answers with a story. A King had a servant who owed him a million dollars, and demanded payment. The servant could not possible pay that kind of debt. And so the king ordered that that servant, his family, and his entire estate be sold to pay debt.

"Mercy", the man cried. And the King forgave the debt.

The forgiven servant ran across someone who owed him ten dollars and demanded payment. And when that man could not come up with the money, the servant had him thrown into debtors prison.

When word of that got back to the King he threw that unforgiving servant in a dungeon to be tortured.

"So my heavenly Father will do to you," Jesus says, "if you do not forgive your brother or sister."

That's heavy stuff. If we do not forgive one another Jesus says God will remember our sin, relive the pain it causes him, and repay us in full.

Why that would be ... hell.

I don't think Jesus is telling us that God's forgiveness is conditional, that we have to forgive first before God will forgive us. I think Jesus is telling us that if we are unwilling to forgive or unable to forgive, it is likely an indication that we have not yet experienced God's forgiveness.

And the fix for that is repentance. For **me** to remember my sin. For **me** to relive the grief and pain that my sin has caused God. For **me** to consider that my sin demands payment – and that **Jesus made** that payment on the cross.

“Father forgive him” – those words were spoken for **me**. Those words were spoken for you. They cover all my sin ... my debt has been paid in full.

When I realize that I have been forgiven so much, how can I remember your sin against me, and relive the pain that it caused, and demand repayment?

*Dear Jesus, do I **have** to forgive in the same way that I have **been** forgiven?*

*Do I **have** to forgive those who did me wrong*

in the same way the Father has forgiven all the wrong I've done?

*Do I **have** to forgive those who snubbed me*

in the same way the Father forgives me for those times

I fail to worship Him, to pray,

those times I walk away from Bible study?

*Do I **have** to forgive those who got mad at me*

in the same way the Father forgives me

those times that I am upset because He did not do what I demanded of him,

or watched Him give others the blessings I thought I deserved?

*Do I **have** to forgive those who are saying bad things about me*

in the same way the Father forgives me

when I fail to speak up for Him

or defend the little ones whom He loves?

*Do I **have** to forgive those whom I just do not like*

in the same way the Father forgave me when I was still His enemy?

The Father forgives.

And as the forgiven, I can learn to forgive you.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.