

WELCOME 7th September 2025 – 13 Pentecost '25 C

Genesis 45:1-15

Welcome! It's great to be together again...

As always...along w/ your worship order you have **Bible Study Qs** & **Growing Praise** inserts that over the week lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & then out to share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups; Friday @ 1pm.

As we move into this week... "Punch back twice as hard" that's how Fmr POTUS Obama said his administration dealt w/ their political opponents. It was, he said, politics "the Chicago-way." You don't GET EVEN you GET MORE. **2X** Sounds like the old Conan the Barbarian line (1982 movie) about what's "best in life" to which Conan **replied**: "Crush your enemies. See them driven before you. And hear the lamentations of their women." They didn't call him "barbarian" for nothing.

Today we discover a better way: **But** *don't be upset, & don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.* Rather than being defined by what was done **TO HIM**, Joseph chose to be defined by what God was doing **THROUGH HIM**. Joseph shows us that even painful experiences can become the foundation for life-giving restoration when we allow God's grace to work in us through them. God's grace transforms even our deepest wounds into instruments of His purpose. This same grace invites us to see beyond our hurts to discover how God might use our painful seasons for his greater purposes, becoming agents of his reconciliation in a world that desperately needs the healing power of forgiveness.

Joseph...discarded as a slave by his brothers...left all but for dead...reclaims his brothers, reconciles to his family, & re-establishes the sovereignty of God's promise over them all. There is no return punch...no lamenting women. But there is a family restored by forgiveness & by seeing behind the seen to the shocking grace of God for all people.

Like *a defibrillator, God's grace shocks us;
not to hurt us, but to restart our broken dead hearts.*

Let's pray together, & experience from REVENGE TO RECONCILIATION today...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord, we come as we are, to become what you meant us to be. We come as we are, wounded, afraid at times, broken at all times, full of disappointments... We ask you to make us whole. Set us free. Let us restore by forgiveness what in us & been rent asunder by sin.

We come as we are trusting that you will make us what you desire. Thank you for mercy that reaches to us, for patience that waits for our return, and for love that is always ready to welcome us and bring us home to the Father...Jesus in your Name we pray...Amen

Let's Sing & then hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What "sin" against you would you find hard to forgive?
2. Is forgiveness common among people you know?
Does it seem uncommon in the world as you see it? Why do you think that is?

13 PENTECOST '25 C – BEHIND THE SEEN: REVENGE TO RECONCILIATION

"Everyone" says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive" CS Lewis' insightful observation rings true. What "sin" against you would you find hard to forgive? We could all name something...if we were honest. Every now & then something I thought I'd forgiven boils to the surface...& I have to forgive it all over again. This guy has a lot to forgive. Ian Wilkinson...you've heard his name 1000X over the last 2 yrs... 1000sX more over the last few months. The lone survivor of a poisoned lunch. He was the victim of attempted murder...barely survived...still suffers the effects of the toxin that killed his wife & two other relatives. Forgiveness to him is more than a "lovely idea," he actually did it.

His victim's impact statement...in which he detailed the effect of the crime against him & his family rocked the courtroom & the media. In part he said, "I am distressed that (she) has acted with callous & calculated disregard for my life & the life of those I loved...What foolishness possesses someone to think that murder could be the solution to their problems, particularly people who only have good intentions towards them? In regards to the murders of Heather, Gail, Don, I am compelled to seek justice...but I make an offer of forgiveness to (her)...Now I am no longer (her) victim; she has become the victim of my kindness." Wilkinson said he bore (his wife's murderer) no ill will & his prayer for her was that she would use her time in custody to reform. Forgiveness to Ian is more than a "lovely idea," it's a way of life that he walks alongside Christ. Ian is the pastor of a church in rural Victoria.

Proverbs 25:21-22 commands: *If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink. You will heap burning coals of shame on their heads, & the Lord will reward you.* To greet evil w/ kindness...forgiveness...compassion...is to magnify the grotesque nature of evil so that it stands in stark contrast to the good. Like walking the extra mile or turning the other cheek, to return blessing for curse makes the evil repulsive in the eyes of every witness. In Romans 12:19-21 Paul quotes that verse & adds: *Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.* Revenge, Paul reminds us is God's business...not ours...scales of justice are his to balance...But the greatest triumph is to overwhelm hate by love.

I was reminded of 2015 shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston, Sth Carolina (oldest black church in the Southern US). ^{W/in} days of the shooting, intended by the mentally disturbed shooter to ignite a race war, some of the families of the victims deliberately chose to tell a different story & some like Anthony Thompson & Nadine Collier forgave the murderer. Invoking their pain, they offered forgiveness as the only way to triumph over hate. **AND**...they went one

step further: Mr Thompson (also a pastor) said, "We would like you to take this opportunity to repent...Repent. Confess. Give your life to the one who matters the most, Christ, so he can change your ways no matter what happens to you & you'll be OK." Not just "I forgive you," but "now take this moment to see how God can create a new you by HIS forgiveness."

What "sin" against you would you find hard to forgive? If I were Joseph...let's see, being sold into slavery, left for dead, abandoned to strangers, lies, betrayal, being forgotten, slavery, imprisonment, exiled from the family you love...Hands up if you can forgive all that...Joseph did...*But don't be upset, & don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.* Given the **opportunity AND THE POWER** to "punch back 2X as hard" or "crush his enemies, see them driven ^{b/4} him & hear the lamentations of their women," *JOSEPH DIDN'T. Rather than being defined by what was done TO HIM, Joseph chose to be defined by what God was doing THROUGH HIM. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you & your families alive & to preserve many survivors.* Behind the seen, Joseph knows God has preserved, sustained & elevated his life among the Egyptians so that God's sovereign saving power might be seen at work through him...so that his promise to Abraham & his descendants might be fulfilled & the surrounding nations might be blessed through them.

I reckon every one of us has at some point over the course of our lives had thoughts of seeking revenge. Forgiveness is not a universal experience. Our world is forever scarred by wars & ongoing conflicts built around some sense of grievance-induced revenge...punching back 2X as hard for having lost this territory or that previous conflict...some historic footnote that spirals into death & chaos for 1000s. Scholars understand that the OT command "eye for an eye/tooth for a tooth" was a limit to the endless cycles of retribution/revenge repeated endlessly throughout the ancient world. But even that leaves folks half-blind & eating through a straw. Which is why the Kingdom of God's grace inaugurated in Jesus is so shocking. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus commands: *"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbour' & hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil & the good, & he sends rain on the just & the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, (made whole) even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (whole) – Mt 5:43-48* Wholeness is never found in a one-eyed snaggle-toothed world.

In this pivotal moment in the story of Joseph - who had every human reason to want revenge against the brothers who sold him into slavery — instead of revenge chose

forgiveness & restoration. In doing so he reveals that God works through even our most painful circumstances to accomplish his greater purposes, turning what others intend for evil not only into something good but also into an opportunity to see & experience God's transformative & amazing grace. Rather than revenge, which anyone who knew what had happened would have expected, we see instead God's plan & God's transforming grace working through Joseph's response to his brothers. Behind the seen, Joseph sees God's hand & God's heart at work. 3X Joseph declares "God sent me" to preserve life (vss 5, 7, 8). The grace that enables Joseph to choose reconciliation over revenge reveals God's transforming work in his heart, making him an instrument of salvation for his family & countless others. Through Joseph's forgiveness, God's plan to preserve his covenant people unfolds not through judgement, but through radical shocking grace.

I quoted CS Lewis earlier...I will again...**To** be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. It's true. Oh I know you haven't shot up a church Bible study or poisoned the relatives you don't like. You haven't gone so far as having lamenting women flee ^b/₄ you...but every one of us owed God a debt we couldn't pay... **"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves & not living in the truth. But if we confess our sin, God, who is faithful & just will forgive our sin & cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** – 1 Jn 1:8-10 ...we couldn't but Jesus did...or as the GP today notes: **The** cross is the ultimate evidence that there is no length the love of God will refuse to go in effecting reconciliation. *For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be sin for us, so that we could be made right w/ God through Christ* – Paul would write to the followers of Jesus in Corinth. In today's reading...verse 4 blows me away: **"Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. He said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt."**

To those who sent him as far away as they could muster...Joseph calls them close. We hear in that an echo of Paul writing to the church in Corinth...*For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them, & he gave to us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"*

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As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

TAKE IT HOME

Who do you need to forgive?

Where do you sense God calling you to be like Joseph & to forgive like Jesus?

"...anyone who belongs to Christ is a new creation. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them, & he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be sin for us, so that we could be made right w/ God through Christ." – 2 Cor 5:17-21

Let's pray... Lord Jesus because of you & you alone we are restored to the Father forever. Through your grace alone we are born again, not by human doing but yours. By your Spirit unleashed in us, create in us hearts that forgive freely, reconcile willingly, & seek restoration instead of revenge...Let the world see you at work in us through all our broken places...through you Lord Jesus Christ we pray...
Amen