

In the name of our Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. **This is God's Word for our meditation.**

Dear Friends,

Did you catch Peter's question in the Gospel lesson for today? **"How many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"** There's got to be a limit right? Especially if they keep doing the same thing over and over again. Makes you wonder if there is true repentance there.

Then we have Joseph in our sermon text for today. We might think he had every right to hold a grudge against his brothers and look for some way to get revenge. After all they had sold him into slavery and that got him taken to far away Egypt where he was a slave and then later thrown into prison. But instead of revenge, Joseph was anxious to forgive his brothers and he told them they were forgiven a number of times.

As we consider our lessons for today and especially our sermon text, may we consider, **"What true repentance looks like,"** and also **"What true forgiveness looks like."** May we see how we can apply those lessons to our lives.

I. You might wonder, "Why do I need repentance – just give me forgiveness and I am all set." There are some churches that don't worry about repentance and only focus on forgiveness. But repentance is necessary to help us address our sin and any guilt that might come along with that sin.

Repentance is sorrow over our sin and then trying to turn away from the temptation that leads us into that sin. Repentance prepares our heart for forgiveness and forgiveness gets rid of the guilt..... none of us wants to carry around a pile of guilt because it reminds us of what we would rather forget. Guilt brings with it the fear of punishment – punishment from God and punishment from the one we might have wronged.

Guilt comes as a result of the Law. The law written in our hearts (our conscience) and the written law God has given us (the 10 commandments). Sometimes we might carry a load of guilt around for a long time even if we have been forgiven. The brothers of Joseph carried their load of guilt for 39 years. The fear that someday they would have to pay for selling their brother into

slavery. Guilt is like that – hanging around; reminding us that we have earned that punishment and eventually we will have to pay up.

Dealing with guilt is not easy. It goes against our human nature to deal with our guilt because the first step is to confess our sin. To say, “I screwed up and I’m sorry.” and then to take full responsibility for that sin. It is very possible that Jacob recognized the guilt his sons were carrying because of what they had done to Joseph and so, in order to help them make their confession he may have told them, **“This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.”**

The sons of Jacob wanted to deal with their guilt but they were afraid, so there is a good chance they sent Benjamin to bring this message to Joseph. Benjamin had not been involved when the other ten brothers sold Joseph into slavery and therefore did not carry the guilt which they did.

There is a saying that “Confession is good for the soul,” but as we consider God’s Word, we find that it is necessary for the soul. John in his first letter said, **“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9). Confession includes recognizing we have done wrong, admitting it, and asking for forgiveness (That really is what repentance is all about).

When Joseph heard the confession of his brothers he wept. A lot of people think that was because he was happy his brothers had confessed their sin, but I think it was because he was sad. He had forgiven his brothers unconditionally years ago and explained how God had used their actions to save millions of people through Joseph. I think Joseph was sad because his brothers sent their confession by messenger rather than come themselves. I think he was sad because this showed that his brothers were still carrying a load of guilt around from this sin and weren’t able to let that guilt go when he forgave them.

Then an amazing thing happened. The brothers themselves came and threw themselves at the feet of Joseph and said, **“We are your slaves.”** The final part of their confession. They not only confessed their sin but were also willing to accept the consequences of their sin – whatever that might be. They were taking responsibility for their sin and trusting in God’s mercy, to bring them forgiveness and help them through whatever the consequences might bring. That is what true repentance looks like.

II. Joseph’s response, “Am I in the place of God?” is better stated, “Who am I to interfere with God’s plans?” He points out to his brothers how God used their evil intent to bless and prosper Joseph and set in place a plan to save millions of people from starvation. Moses writes that Joseph then spoke to their hearts because that is where true repentance comes from – the heart and that is where the balm of forgiveness needs to work to bring healing to the soul.

We’re not told specifically what he said but it most certainly had to do with God’s promise of forgiveness. This was the only thing that could bring his brothers true comfort to calm a troubled heart. The words of God that your sins are forgiven.

Where are you when it comes to repentance? Are you carrying around a burden of guilt? Is there a sin you are having trouble with – either it's something you don't want to turn from or you really haven't admitted to yourself and to God that this is a sin? Satan loves to see us carry this burden of guilt around. Satan wants us to feel unforgiven. But maybe when it comes to repentance you are at the other extreme.

You really don't think about your sins too much because Jesus paid for them, right? But because you don't think about them you don't change your life or try to avoid sin either. Satan loves that also, when our sins don't bother us and we keep repeating the same ones over and over again without a thought.

What's the right way to approach repentance? Confessing our sins – sometimes to the one or ones we have wronged – but always to God and not just Sunday mornings but every day as we regularly go to him in prayer. Acknowledging our sinful condition, trying to turn from that sin, and then gratefully receiving the forgiveness that God's Word speaks, to calm our hearts.

We talk about sin at church because sin is a serious thing that affects our spiritual welfare now and forever. We also talk about forgiveness and rejoice at the "Good News" that Jesus has paid for all of our sins and they are forgiven. We can never hear those words too often. When we hear them, we want to trust those words and let go of the guilt we might be carrying. If Christ can forgive and cast our sins away from us, we should let them go as well.

And forgiveness is what we all need and we should be willing to forgive as Christ forgave us. We have talked a lot about repentance but we can't forget the forgiveness God shows us and the forgiveness Joseph showed towards his brothers. Joseph trusted in God to work everything out for his good and God did and because of his faith in God, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers – to let their sin go.

When we are bothered with how someone has wronged us, may we be as willing as Joseph to forgive their sin. May we let the love of Christ fill our hearts and remove any feeling of revenge.

As we think about repentance and forgiveness, whenever we use the words, "I'm sorry," may they always be words of true repentance, spoken from the heart, and then may we feel the joy and peace that come with the words, **"Your sins are forgiven."** Amen.