

Sunday Sermon: February 24, 2019

Sermon Text: Genesis 45: 3-8a, 15

Sermon Theme: Forgiveness is not a negotiation. It is given fully and freely

<sup>3</sup> Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! <sup>5</sup> And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. <sup>6</sup> For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. <sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

There are a lot of things that can be negotiated today. You can negotiate the price of the car or item on the internet you want or buy. You negotiate the terms of your job. There are teachers’ unions and professional athletes who want to renegotiate better terms of their contracts. You find out that the price on the sticker is not the price if you are buying in bulk, or if you ask to speak to the right manager. We even negotiate with our families about bed times and curfews. There are times that the old statement is true, “Everything has a price, you just have to find it.”

Negotiations are even big on TV. Whenever I watch those shows on TV where there is a negotiation, whether it is the car remodeling shows, or the pawn shop shows, or the picker shows, I am always amazed at the ability these men have to negotiate their price. They are shrewd. They drive a hard bargain and they know what price they want to pay and they usually get it. The only time they have a problem is when the price or the terms are so high that, they are not realistic.

Yet, of all the things that are negotiable, there is one thing that is not a negotiation. In the Word of God before us this morning, we see that forgiveness is not a negotiation. It is given to us freely and fully and we give it to others freely and fully.

The Bible lesson of Joseph and his brothers is one that could be made into a motion picture. It has all of the highlights that would make people come and see it. It has betrayal, lying, human trafficking, slavery, sex, imprisonment, and then an amazing rise to glory and power. It is one of those stories that has a surprise ending that no one sees coming.

Many years before our sermon text, Joseph is the youngest of 12 brothers. He has all the advantages of the youngest brother. He is the favorite of his mother and his father. He gets doted on with special blessings and privileges. They made it clear that he was the favorite. He also had some problems because of this special behavior. He is full of himself, he speaks quickly and often without thinking, he feels entitled to the things that he has.

God had given Joseph two very powerful and unique visions of the future where he would have authority and power. Having someone, anyone, telling you that they will be great isn’t very good, but having your little brother tell you he will be greater than you, or more important than you, that would definitely cause a problem.

The brothers form a plan to get rid of Joseph. Some are so angry they want to kill him. However, some cooler heads prevail and they agree not to kill him. Instead, they will just sell him into slavery and make up an elaborate story that he has been killed by wild animals.

This is only the beginning of Joseph’s troubles. He is then sold to another man named Potiphar to be a slave in his household. He works hard and is put in charge the whole house of Potiphar. Things seem to be looking up, until Potiphar’s wife begins to flirt with him, even offering to have an affair with him. He says no. The scorned woman makes up a story of rape and Joseph is thrown into prison.

Joseph is more or less forgotten in this prison until the day comes when he is able, through the power of the Lord, to interpret a dream for Pharaoh. This dream predicts a great famine in Egypt. The Lord also allows Joseph to have a plan to prevent the worst of the famine from destroying Egypt.

Because of this, Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of the preparations for the famine. He is in charge of storing up the excess grain. Joseph is the second in command over all of Egypt. It is now that his brothers return to the scene.

The famine has extended all the way to Israel. The brothers from Israel have to go to Egypt to purchase provisions to take home so that they will live. They do not know that they are standing in front of their brother, but he does.

Finally, after all these years, fueled by his anger over what they have done to him and all the hardship he has had to endure, he can now take revenge. Sounds like a perfect Hollywood twist doesn't it?

Yet, that is not what happened. In an even twistier twist, Joseph brings his brothers to himself and forgives them. With tears streaming down his face, he hugs them and kisses them and asks them if father is still alive.

You can imagine what thoughts are going through the heads of the brothers. Before they knew it was their brother, they had seen the authority this man wielded. Before, they had known it was Joseph, they had marveled at the richness of his court and the majesty of his palace. Before they had known it was Joseph, they had been afraid of his power. None of that fear is taken away when they find out that it is Joseph, they are even more afraid because they now see that that power and authority is wielded by someone who has every human right to punish them.

This was Joseph's opportunity to really make his brothers pay. Like those negotiators on TV, he could have driven for his terms. He could have gotten the sorrow and repentance he wanted from his brothers in the way that that he wanted it. But he doesn't because the forgiveness that Joseph offered wasn't a negotiation. But he doesn't use his power and authority to get even with them, instead he forgives them freely, no strings attached and he tells them why, **Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you<sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.** <sup>8</sup>**“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.**

This forgiveness that Joseph shows is so amazing that the brothers can't believe that it is true. Even years later, after Joseph forgives them, after he moves the whole family to Egypt, even after he gives them an amazing place to live and work, the brothers are still afraid that Joseph might be waiting to get them. After, their father Jacob dies, they come to Joseph with their fears, they once again ask him for forgiveness and offer to be his slaves in exchange for their freedom.

Joseph had to reassure his brothers that the forgiveness he offered to them was given freely and fully because this all happened as God intended it to. He intended to work through this trouble for their benefit and for his.

Joseph's demands seemed so ridiculous for his brothers. He forgave them fully and freely. I think you understand why the brothers were skeptical. This is just not something that happens.

We think this way, because our forgiveness is not often full or free. So often the type of forgiveness that we give is a negotiated forgiveness. We drive a hard bargain and set ridiculous terms.

1. There are times that we are not willing to forgive. We don't even want to talk about it. What you did to me is too bad, it had hurt me too much to forgive you.
2. I will forgive you if you show me, if you prove to me, you are sorry.
3. I will forgive you, if you promise me that this will never happen again.
4. I will forgive only if you continue to be sorry about this and pay for it as long as I remember to bring it up to you.

Anytime we say or think, I forgive you if..... we are no longer forgiving fully and freely, we are now entering into a negotiation for forgiveness.

What if Jesus had terms of forgiveness for us? One of the reasons that we groaned when we looked at the last few examples of forgiveness is because either we have forgiven that way, or others have used those against us. What happens if we set conditions on our forgiveness on someone else? Did they meet those conditions? Maybe, but probably not. What if someone set conditions on their forgiveness for us? Did we meet those conditions? Maybe, but probably not.

What if Jesus set conditions on our forgiveness? Would we meet those conditions? Definitely not. We fail, because we are sinful. We do things to our God and to others all the time and we can't stop because sin is

part of us. Sometimes it's hard to prove that we are sorry for a sin, because we really aren't sorry we have done it. We can't promise that we will never do it again because in reality, we probably will. And there is a time when we will not be sorry any longer about what we have done no matter how long it is held over our heads.

If forgiveness is a negotiation, we will never be forgiven because we can't meet our end of the bargain. Yet, Jesus is the hardest negotiator and what he sets as terms are very high. That sounds strange to say that. But think about it. Jesus terms are ridiculous. Jesus says, "You are forgiven fully and freely of all your sins. Go in peace" Not you might be or you could be, but you are forgiven. That's ridiculous, that's not a negotiation at all. All of our sins have been paid for. There is nothing we need to do for this forgiveness, he has already forgiven us freely. When we come to Jesus with our sins, there is no negotiation for his forgiveness, we are forgiven.

This is the forgiveness that Jesus shows to us that he wants us to show to others. Joseph did not forgive his brothers because they could and would pay him back, he forgave them because he saw the plan that God had carried out through them. Joseph did not know the name Jesus, but he did know promises of the Messiah. He did know that God loved him and he saw that love and mercy of God in God's goodness to him. In the face of all that God had done for him, he could do nothing but forgive his brothers.

The same is true for us. When we see the ridiculous forgiveness that Jesus has given to us, that we don't earn or deserve, how can we forgive in any less a ridiculous way? How can we put conditions on our forgiveness when he has not done this to us? By human standards we shouldn't show forgiveness either. But Jesus asks us to forgive in a different way. Paul says in **Ephesians 4: 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

If there's one thing I'd like you to take home today and think about it's this: The forgiveness that Jesus gave to you is not a negotiation. He does not demand anything from you, he forgives you fully and freely. In the light of what Jesus has done for us, may we also be willing to offer forgiveness to others in the same full and free way that we have been forgiven. Amen