

Psalm 130: 3-4 (Trinity Sunday in Minocqua June 12/13)

"Forgiveness Matters"

**If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.**

Forgiveness Matters! Do you remember these stories of forgiveness and grace?

Jacob and Esau

Twin boys grabbing at each other before they were even born. And although they were twins, they were nothing alike. One was momma's boy staying close to the apron strings. One was pappa's hunter. Mom and dad had their own struggles. Favoritism was an issue. On his papa's death bed, with mom's help, the younger twin tricked his father and betrayed his brother. The deed was so terrible that he had to run from the murderous threat of his brother.

Decades later and two sets of families under his care the day came for the brothers to reconcile. The night before, Jacob lost a night of sleep and a wrestling match with the Lord in prayer. He separated his two families that next morning. With a knot in his gut and a limp he approached the valley to meet his brother. **"Esau ran to meet his brother Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept."** (Genesis 33: 4) Forgiveness Matters!

Joseph and his Brothers

The next generation gives more details of Jacob's family, in particular the life of one of the boys. The whole thing was a hot mess. Favoritism, perhaps not always intended, was splitting the split family apart. It was deeper than the normal pushing and bantering of sibling rivalry. There were death threats. And the favorite boy was no saint either. He likely had it coming most of the time. After dumping him into a pit and placing him into human traffic rings, the brothers tricked dad (it ran in the family).

That young man had his share troubles along the way: false accusation of sexual misconduct; prison and more betrayals by broken promises from new friends. **"The Lord was with Joseph."** (Genesis 39:2). He made him second in command of the most powerful nation of the time. The time came when his own brothers needed him to be gracious. Like the Psalm writer in our verse for today, the brothers contemplated *what if Jacob has kept a record of our sins.* (Genes 50: 15). You may recall that they devised one more trick: a falsified forgery letter from dad begging for their brother's grace. Joseph cried. He knew it was a forgery. You remember what comes next: **"You intended it for harm, but God intended it for good"** (Genesis 50: 20). Forgiveness Matters!

Saul/ Paul

What about Saul who became Paul? The man who tended the coat-check at the stoning of Stephan. The man who made it his life's mission to imprison and murder people of faith in Jesus. The man who set out to travel the Mediterranean world with legal papers to do that wherever he went. He met Jesus. He was baptized. He was surrounded with new friends in Christianity. He was instructed and inspired to travel that world with sermons and letters of the Grace from and about Jesus. **"By the grace of God I am what I am!" Paul wrote in the great resurrection Chapter (1 Corinthians 15:10) "and his grace was not without effect."** Forgiveness Matters!

Jesus from the Cross

And what about Jesus? What about his enemies? His own people rejected him from early on. His hometown attempted to throw him down a 4,000 foot drop. Crowds of people became fair weather friends. They went from asking for his help to shouting for his death. Best friends betrayed him, denied him, abandoned him and left him for dead. Hired gorilla soldiers beat and whipped him, tossed him around like a dishrag, spiked him to timbers. His response? **“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing!” (Luke 23:34).** Forgiveness Matters!

Make it Personal

We are not immune from joining the stories of the Bible people we meet. We are no better than Jacob’s kinivary when we grab, backstab, and betray the people close to us. We are no better than Joseph’s brothers when we carry hate and resentment and fail to celebrate the good of others. We are no better than Saul when our personal agendas divide the kingdom of God rather than unite people - when we scream hurtful threats at people we have not taken the time to know or love. We are no better than Judas or Peter when we betray or deny Jesus for our own earthly benefits. We are no better than Pilate or Roman brutes when we dismiss his truths or use him as a punching bag when things do not go our way. And through it all his theme rings like a gracious bell: **“Father, forgive them!”** pointing to his outpoured blood and empty grave as the only reasons why!

It is Trinity Sunday. Permit me to read from a favorite author about the Trinity

Prof. Daniel Deuchlander on Unity in the Trinity (From “The Splendor of Christian Doctrine”)

“We cannot help but be struck by the beauty of the words that the members of the Trinity speak to and about one another. Read the Gospel of John. You can almost see the glow on Jesus’ face as he talks about the Father - everything he does, he does out of love for and in obedience to his Father who sent him. No less the Father, when he speaks; he points to the Son as the sole, great object of his delight, to whom all mankind should give heed. When Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit, it is as though everything was for the glory of the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father and the Son. And then when the Holy Spirit speaks, who and what does he speak about? The Son! Everything is about the Son! He speaks so that we remember and think always about Jesus. (Just imagine what life would be like if husbands and wives and friends spoke that way about one another).” (Deutschlander p.100).

Imagine! Imagine church workers, employers, communities, teachers/ students, parents/ children, and unreconciled enemies. Imagine the changes for those who learn of this United, Holy Trinity! Imagine the endless APPS for daily life when sinners work side by side with sinners.

Go with the Psalm writer. He wrote this Psalm as a song for families to sing as they ascended the hillsides to the festivals at the great Temple of Jerusalem. Go with him alone. Go with the Bible People we met today. Go with him with the people you love. Go to the Holy Trinity in the pages of John’s Gospel. Go to Font! Go to the Table of Bread and Wine! Go to the foot of the Cross and see from Jesus, that Forgiveness Matters!

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Pastor Michael Helwig