

Forgiveness Finished

Good Friday – 04/15/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Genesis 50:15-21 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✘ We Missouri Synod Lutherans boldly confess with the Bible that “All Scripture is breathed out by God. All Scripture is useful. And all Scripture is true.”
 - ➔ Yet at the same time we know that all Scripture is not equal. If God’s Word is indeed a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, then some of those words shine brighter than others. Some of those words provide greater clarity and comfort than others. It’s hard to imagine doing without certain sections of Scripture.
 - ➔ I mean, what would Christmas be like without angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest”? What would Easter be like if we didn’t hear the angel declare, “He is risen”? And what would this night – Good Friday – be without our Savior’s great summation from the cross: “It is finished”?
- ✘ Heaven and hell hang in the balance, based upon that little phrase from the parched lips of our dying Lord: “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). Without those words, we might be left to wonder, “Is my sin completely paid for? Is my salvation fully won? Or is there something more that I; that we need to do to seal the deal?” But with those words, we have complete certainty; we have comfort and assurance of our salvation!
 - ➔ Before God Himself, we have absolute confidence instead of fear or trepidation. It is finished! All that would condemn us and all that we deserve has been answered for by the bloody death of our Brother, Jesus. As Isaiah 53:5-6 says, “With His wounds we are healed. ... The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”.

I. Joseph’s brother lacked comfort/certainty

- ✘ But the brothers of Joseph whom we’ve been following this year in Lent, had no such clarity or comfort concerning the forgiveness of their sins. These jealous brothers had conspired to murder the brother they hated.
 - ➔ Instead they thought it was better to make a buck by selling Joseph into slavery; that it was better than to shed his blood. These sly guys had gone so far as to tell their dear ol’ dad that his favorite son was dead – shredded and slaughtered by a vicious animal.
 - ➔ With brothers like these, who needs enemies, right? Throughout our 40-day journey with Joseph, we’ve heard how his life, in spite of it all, was led by the LORD. Then we heard what should have been the happy ending – how Joseph saved his entire family from famine and forgave the sins of his 10 big brothers. It should have been the happy ending even for those sinful brothers; that’s supposed to be the idea of forgiveness.
- ✘ But now today we discover that Joseph’s brothers have all still been doubting Joseph’s forgiveness. Apparently they assumed that Joseph’s forgiveness had some kind of an expiration date; that it all sounded too good to be true.
 - ➔ So all these years later – seventeen years since last week’s installment – now that their father, Jacob has died, the brothers figure that all bets are off. Joseph’s brothers are now filled with dread. They assume that their father’s death is signaling their doom.
 - ➔ Apparently they are thinking that Joseph is free to dish out revenge and retribution because their father is no longer there to protect them. In verse 15 they say to each other, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him”. They truly are afraid that

Joseph will now mete out punishment for their past sins; that now they will get what they know they have always deserved.

- ✘ I think so many of us find it kind of easy to feel at least a bit of sympathy for Joseph's brothers at this point. In fact, if we're honest, many or most of us can quickly identify with them, because we share their guilt; we share their shame; we share their sin. Yes, our own jealousy and hatred of others is not so different from theirs. It's just that ours is perhaps more carefully concealed.

→ That's the world we sinners live in. We all have enemies whom we'd gladly be rid of, especially if we could make a buck in the process. And we all at least know the pain of a prickly conscience – a conscience that relentlessly reminds us of our sin and makes our hearts heavy with fear and guilt and shame and that, even after we've been told that we are forgiven.

- ✘ So what did Joseph's troubled brothers do? They decided to take action. They manufactured a message from beyond the grave – a false dying wish from their deceased father, that Joseph would forgive his brothers all their sin and evil. Then for good measure, if not a little bit of extra drama, they all fell down on their knees and declared, "Behold, we are your servants" (Gen. 50:18).

→ With those words, we see where they obviously went wrong in their quest for forgiveness. To say, "We are your servants" is to try and strike a bargain; to cut a deal; to aim at engineering a great escape from the punishment they deserve.

→ You and I do the same thing all the time. It's just the way that our world has trained us to think. We vow to make things right and work our way back into the good graces of those we've sinned against. We promise to do better and to pay off our debt. Like the prodigal son who, on his way home, planned to ask his father to take him back as a hired hand (Lk. 15:19), so we think we can clean up our own mess and earn our forgiveness.

II. Forgiveness is God's gift, made certain in Christ

- ✘ But Joseph would have none of it. I'd say that every one of us needs to learn from Joseph to recognize and rejoice in the sacred source of all forgiveness. Joseph asks in verse 19, "Am I in the place of God?" Joseph knows that his full and free forgiveness of his brothers is of divine origin.

→ If it's God's desire and delight to forgive sins, then who is Joseph to withhold forgiveness? In faith, Joseph saw what his guilty brothers could not see. Verse 20, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good". What Joseph's brothers intended for selfishness and evil, God used for good – that many lives should be saved.

- ✘ Can you believe this truth here on this night? Can you comprehend the wonder of Joseph's words? Do you dare to believe the golden good news by which Joseph absolves his brothers?

→ Can it really be so, that all the evil that gets thrown against us, from friend and foe alike – that God will take it up into His own hands and somehow redirect it for His and our good? Are you, by faith, able to see what Joseph saw – that behind the despicable sins his brothers committed against him, God Himself was actively working all along for good?

- ✘ That Good News is never depicted and declared as plainly as it is on this holy day that we call Good Friday. On this day, the good that God intended completely surpassed the evil of all mankind.

→ Just look to the crucifixion cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus and you can see it plainly. It's there at the cross that you and I are able to see and believe in all clarity this glorious good news. Men intended that cross for absolute, pure evil. They wanted to kill the Son of God; to get rid of Him once and for all; to silence Him; to destroy Him.

→ To do so, they lied. They gave false testimony. They perverted justice to engineer the execution of the only truly innocent man ever to walk this earth. It was evil compounded on evil; evil to the nth degree; bloody, blasphemous evil. Yet God in His absolute power used it all for good – for your good – to save you and this entire world full of sinners; to open the kingdom of heaven to you and all true believers in Christ.

✘ That's it! "It is finished". Every sin ever committed against you, and by you is atoned for in the death of Jesus. The word "atoned" means "covered over". Every sin you have ever committed against any and all other people is "covered over" by the blood and death of Jesus so that now when God looks at it He sees Jesus and His blood! It is finished.

→ 2 Corinthians 5:19 assures us, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them". In Jesus, God was working all things for your eternal good. In your Savior, sin and evil do not get the last word. Jesus does. And His last word is the best of news – "It is finished".

✘ Friends, believe it and receive it! Don't let a guilty conscience deceive you into doubting God's full and free forgiveness. Who are we to deny the forgiveness our Lord won for us on the cross? Are we in the place of God? No, but in Christ, God has taken our place, borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. It is finished.

Conclusion

✘ In Joseph's last interaction with his forgiven brothers, we witness a moving and tender scene. In verse 21, with his eyes still wet with tears, Joseph gives his brothers the comfort and clarity that they craved: "'So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them". Joseph demonstrated in both words and actions his ongoing love and affection for his family. He sought to remove any and all doubts his brothers may have harbored about his forgiveness.

✘ This is the same thing that our Lord Jesus does for you and me. Today in the Church, our Lord Jesus not only forgives our sins, but also demonstrates His divine forgiveness with clarity and comfort; with ongoing love and affection.

→ He removes all doubt when He says from the cross, "It is finished," and He gives up His spirit. Moments later, a soldier's spear pierced His side, and John 19:34 tells us that at once there came out blood and water.

→ That blood and water are still flowing here for you – water that washes you clean in Holy Baptism and blood that passes from the chalice to your sin-parched lips. There in that water and blood He washes you and He covers you with the forgiveness of all your sins. There in His sacramental, grace-filled gifts you have clarity, comfort, confidence, and the peace that surpasses understanding.

→ Let there be no doubt. It is finished! Amen.