



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 1, 2017

Pastor Randy Ott

17th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Genesis 50:15-21](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 103](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 14:5-9](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 18:21-35](#)

Sermon Text: [Genesis 50:15-21](#)

The Church Forgives As God Forgives

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

You all just said it a little bit earlier today. You stood here and said to God and one another, "I am totally sinful from birth." Because that is true, you're going to sin. Sometimes you're going to sin against even the people that you love by things that you say and by things that you do. The guilt of that sin at times will keep you up at night. You'll toss and turn. Then finally you'll realize, "You know what? I have to go and tell that person what I did was wrong." So you screw up the courage and in trembling knees you stand before them and say "I've sinned against God and against you. Please forgive me."

So how do you feel when the person that you've said that to looks at you and says, "Okay. I'll forgive you. But I'll never forget"? As you walk away, is there a spring in your step because you have the joy of forgiveness just washing over you? Or do you feel as though you haven't been really forgiven at all?

I think that one is pretty easy to understand, isn't it? If someone looks at you with a pained look and says "I'll never forget," they're basically saying "I mouth the words 'I forgive you' because I'm supposed to, but I don't forgive you, and don't expect me to."

Today we said the theme of our worship as we look at this characteristic of the church is that **The Church Forgives As God Forgives**. That's not just an idea to pin on a theme for a weekly service. It's in [Colossians 3](#). **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** ([Colossians 3:13](#).) That's what he tells us to do.

A little bit earlier we sang Psalm 103. In there it talked about "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us." That tells us what it's like to forgive like God forgives a little bit, right? East and west don't hang out a lot, right? They're

separated from each other. It says God separates our sins from us. So if we're supposed to forgive someone else like God forgave, it means we're supposed to separate that sin from that person.

Then, in case you're still wondering, if you go to [Isaiah 43:25](#), in there it's pretty direct. The Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to write for you and me to read, "The Lord forgives your sins and remembers them no more." That's pretty good. I don't want God to remember my sins. Oh yeah, but he said I'm supposed to forgive as he forgave me. Now that's where it gets hard, right? That's incredibly difficult for us because, like we said, "I am sinful from birth," and one of the most common parts of our sinfulness from birth is that we are incredibly self-centered. When someone else hurts us, we want our pound of flesh. We want our payback. We want revenge. We want to see them hurt like we've been hurt. We're self-centered sinners. That's what we do.

But God tells us we are also little Christs. We are Christians. That means we are to work at forgiving like he forgave us. I'll never tell you that it's easy. I'll never tell you it's going to come naturally to you. But I can tell you that God says as a Christian, we're supposed to be working at getting better at it.

Today we looked at the example of Joseph. I'm amazed that when Joseph's brothers are laying on the ground right in front of him saying "We are your slaves" that he doesn't answer, "You're doggone right you're my slaves! Payback is coming! And it's going to hurt," or however they would express that back then. I could understand that, couldn't you? I mean, Joseph was daddy's favorite. He had that cool coat that none of the other kids had. He was the one who had these dreams that God gave him about everybody bowing down to him and he wasn't bashful about going "Hey, guess what? Not only does dad love me more than he loves you, God loves me more than he loves you because you're going to bow down to me. That's what God said. Isn't that cool? Aren't you guys happy for me that you're going to bow down and worship me?" You know how that was received. They couldn't stand the guy. I can understand that, can't you?

So they decide one day, when Joseph came after he had ratted them out to their dad once about how they had done something wrong when he brought them food, that it was enough with this guy with his coat. "Let's kill him." They take and throw him into a dried out cistern. As he is down there, he can hear the debate going on between the brothers. "Kill him!" "No, sell him into slavery." "No, kill him!" "No, sell him into slavery." I can understand why he wouldn't forgive them, but what I can't understand is why he **would** forgive them. I doubt when those words are echoing in that empty cistern that he is hollering back out, "Hey guys. Love you. I forgive you for everything you're saying." I don't think that's where he is at that point in time, do you? Not a chance. He's a sinner like you and me.

How then does he get to that point when they are face down in the dirt in front of him that he doesn't grind his heel on their necks? How does he forgive and say, not only does he forgive, he says "Get up. You're my brother. You're not my slave. I'll take

care of you. I'll take care of your children." He acts in love towards those people that had wanted to kill him and settled on just selling him into slavery. How does he get to that point? We aren't told directly by God.

But we do know his brothers sold him into slavery. As he is in this caravan of slave traders, I'm guessing, walking to Egypt through Israel, that's a lot of days staring at the back end of a camel, right? He has a lot of time to think. I wonder if he thought about, "You know, I was kind of an arrogant brat to my brothers. What they did is wrong, but maybe what I did was kind of wrong, too." Maybe he started seeing his own sinfulness. I don't know that, but I have to wonder if he didn't reflect on that promise given to Abraham. *All nations on earth will be blessed through you.* ([Genesis 18:18](#); [Genesis 22:18](#); [Genesis 26:4](#).) And he put his trust that God, who loved Abraham and Isaac and his father, Jacob, loved him and would see to it that all nations on earth would be blessed through one of their descendants, which included Joseph, which included forgiveness for him for the times he was an arrogant little brat. I don't know. But I do think time played a role in him seeing the hand of God.

Remember when he gets to Egypt, he gets a pretty good job as far as slave jobs go. Running Potiphar's house. Everything under Potiphar's house was under his control, except for Potiphar's wife. Potiphar's wife tries to grab him by the arm and drag him into bed, and he says "No. How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And what does it get him? It gets him thrown into prison. I don't think he was going "Gee, this is great. I'm sure God has a wonderful plan for my life." I think he's struggling with, because he's a sinner, "I did what is right! Why am I in jail?" ([Genesis 39](#).)

Then maybe a couple years later, or whenever it was, he understands that God has him there so he can interpret those dreams. Then it gets back to Pharaoh. But then he spends even more time in jail. I have to think Egyptian jails weren't Club Med. I think it probably was miserable.

But then when he finally gets to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and becomes Second in Command and he stores up for the seven years of plenty all that grain. Then during the seven years of famine his brothers come down and he puts them through some tests to see, "Are they going to treat younger brother, Benjamin, the same way they treated me?" He sees that his brothers have changed. ([Genesis 41-42](#).)

Now, after dad has died, I understand his brothers being worried and I understand all of that fully, but I'm still amazed that Joseph, now, after all this time, looks back and says, "You did evil. You wanted to harm me. But God used it for the good that is now happening; the saving of many lives. I forgive you and God forgives you. Let's get up and live together, you and me and your children. I'll take care of all of you because I love you and I forgive you." He doesn't pull out the hoops anymore and make them jump through them. He just announces that forgiveness. Which is what our God has done to us.

I'm amazed at what Joseph does. I know God expects me to do it. God expects you to do it. I think it's hard for us because again, as I said, we are incredibly self-centered and we like hanging onto grudges. If you think "You know what? That's not me at all;" I told you to put a bookmark at Psalm 103 before, right? Get your hymnal out. Open up to that Psalm 103. I want to take a look at a section of that again. I want us to kind of do a little self evaluating here.

We sang the Refrain. Then we had those few verses that we sang at the start. Then we sang the Refrain again. Then there is that next section. **"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."**

That's a pretty cool part of the Psalm, right? You sing that and you go, "This is great! God loves me and forgives me even though I'm a sinner putz. Wonderful! I rejoice in this!" I hope you feel that way. I hope you don't just mouth the words and don't think about how cool this is, that God is gracious, slow to anger, towards you.

But now, how are you doing? Look at that same section. Take out "The LORD" and replace it with your name. Randy is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He does not treat others as their sins deserve or repay them according to their iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is Randy's love for those who fear God; as far as the east is from the west, so far has Randy removed others' sins from them. Folks, that ain't me. Is that you when you put your name in there?

Now, the sinful nature in you at this point in time is probably going "Yeah, but you don't understand. This other person was such a jerk. You don't understand what he did to me. I can't forgive them. They were such a jerk to me." Then go back to our Gospel. The Gospel today, when Jesus tells this parable when Peter is suggesting forgiving someone seven times who sins against you, which is way more than the teachers of the Law of his day said, and Jesus says, "No. You just keep on forgiving all the time." Then you look at that parable. The point of the parable is pretty clear I think. Ten thousand bags of gold is an unpayable debt in 100 lifetimes. So when it says at the end that this guy was put in jail and tortured until he could pay it back, that means forever, because he could never pay it back. That's you and me before our God. That's us. That's God had mercy on us and now if we go out and find someone else who has wronged us and that wrong is 100 silver coins compared to what we've done to God and we're unwilling to forgive them, we don't really understand the nature of the Gospel, the nature of Christianity. We have a sinful nature that will excuse it and say "You don't understand. They don't have it coming. They are this and they are that." But when we are unwilling to let go of our grudges and forgive as we have been forgiven, we're that servant in that parable.

This is the thing that then boggles my mind. When I do that, when you do that, our God remains slow to anger and abounding in love. He continues to forgive you because of the life and death of Jesus.

God's minimum requirement for entering into heaven is that you be absolutely perfect. If you still think you measure up to that today, you haven't been listening. We don't love and forgive as God forgives. And yet, through the God-given gift of faith in Jesus, Jesus' perfection is ours. Then all of these times that we have been quick to anger and slow to let go of our grudges, Jesus died for every last one of them.

I understand we're not going to do this perfectly, because we're back where we started. We are sinners. And until we get to heaven, we won't be rid of that sinful nature. But I do know that we can get better the more we understand that just like Joseph, at times we are sinful little brats. But our God keeps loving us.

The more we understand our sinfulness and the immensity of the guilt God has taken away, the more we can begin to love as God has loved us. We'll never do it perfectly. It'll never be easy. But as God's people, we are called to imitate Christ's love. We're not called to do what is easy. We're called to take up our cross and follow him. Sometimes it's hard to forgive and to work at forgetting. This is what we're called to do because that's exactly what our God has done for us. Amen.