



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

September 7, 2008

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 50:15-21

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 50:15-21

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103

Second Lesson: Romans 14:5-9

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Speak Kind Words of Reassurance

To those who repent

Trusting God has done what is good

Kind reassuring words—in your life, when have you heard them? When have you spoke them? Maybe when you were real little and first learning to ride a bike and the bike didn't go the way it was supposed to go. It tips over and your knee drags along the ground a little bit. There is a nice scrape. It stings. The blood is there and you run crying in to mom. Did mom speak kind and reassuring words to you?

Maybe you husbands that have been in the delivery room with your wives, did you speak kind and reassuring words as you used that damp cloth and wiped off their foreheads?

Speaking with a neighbor or coworker or friend who is going through tough times, have you spoken kind, reassuring words to them? Talking with a loved one who is sick or even dying, kind, reassuring words come pretty easily, don't they? The love that God has for us in Christ and speaking of that with one another and encouraging one another with those words—kind reassuring words.

If talking to the person that raped and killed your daughter, kind reassuring words, would they come quite as quickly, as readily, as easily? If talking to the drunk driver that hit your wife, killed your wife, kind reassuring words, is that on the tip of your tongue?

Think of what we just read from Genesis 50. Think of the story of Joseph and that what we read today ends with Joseph speaking kind and reassuring words to his brothers. It ought to boggle our minds and, probably for most of us I'm assuming, humble us a little bit also.

You probably know the story of Joseph pretty well, right? This is one of the stories that we teach from the Old Testament over and over again in Sunday school and Bible History classes and in our school. You know about Joseph and about his family. They were dysfunctional before the term "dysfunctional" was common, right? Dad has his favorites—Joseph. He gave him that wonderful coat that said "look at this guys. I love your brother a lot more than I love you. Here's this nice coat I am going to give him."

Then Joseph, filled to the brim with this special love his father had for him, when God gave him those dreams about everyone else bowing down to him and worshipping him,

what did he do with those dreams? He ran to his brothers and said “Guess what guys! One day you are all going to worship me.” That’s like throwing gas on the fire, isn’t it?

His brothers didn’t care for him because Joseph had also done what he should have done when they were screwing up while they were watching the livestock, the sheep one time. Joseph told dad and they got in trouble. That was another strike against Joseph. But this wasn’t just dislike. This was pure and abject hatred that the brothers had for Joseph. One day when he showed up they said “Hey! Here’s our chance. Let’s kill him!” Finally one of the brothers stepped forward and in this nobleness says “Hey. Let’s just sell him into slavery. Let’s not kill him.” That’s brotherly love, right? “Let’s not kill my brother. Let’s just sell him so we never see him again.” “And here’s a good idea guys! Let’s take that nice coat that none of us can stand. Let’s get some animal blood and douse that coat in it and take it home to dad and say, ‘I don’t know what happened. It kind of looks like maybe something ate him.’”

This kind of dysfunctional family put Joseph through these things. And Joseph had, not a bus ride to Egypt, probably walking behind some camels or something, to think about what his brothers did to him. Do you think by the time he got to Egypt he was saying, “God will bring some good out of this. Things will be alright. I’m sure this isn’t a problem.” Or do you think he wanted to rip his brothers limb from limb? I’m betting limb from limb.

Then it’s a long, long time before they meet again. Joseph went through a lot of other things in life that were pretty tough. He served Potiphar faithfully but ended up getting thrown into prison when Potiphar’s wife accused him of attempted rape. He got in prison and told some of those dreams that those guys had and then the guy forgot him when he got back to Pharaoh. But God had him in that place at that time so that God would eventually bring out some good from the wickedness of what his brothers had done so that God could preserve His people, the children of Israel. He could preserve them from a famine so that Joseph would end up as second in command over all of Egypt, answerable only to Pharaoh himself. He got to that place so there would be the stores of food so that God’s people, His chosen people, that dysfunctional family, His chosen people could come down to Egypt and live when there was danger so that everything would be preserved so that the Messiah could eventually be born many, many years later.

Now the time had come from what we just read where Jacob had come down and been reunited with his son. Think of what Jacob had to work through. His own sons lying to him and showing him that coat of blood and how he had to work through all of that and how he must have felt. The joy of seeing his son and the abject horror at what his other sons had done to Joseph. There was a lot of working through a lot of issues that this family had to do, right? Now Jacob is finally dead and the brothers are pretty worried. I think that is understandable. If you had done this to your littlest brother or your second-to-littlest brother and he now was the second most powerful person in the world, do you think payback might be coming?

Joseph put the brothers through the wringers when they came down to get the grain during the famine with the cup and the silver and all those other things and one of the

brothers having to stay behind and getting them to bring Benjamin back. He had put his brothers through the wringer, but in reality, what he could have done was say to his servants, "You see those guys there? I want each of their limbs cut off and scattered around because of what they have done to me." And no one would lift a finger to say "no" to him.

But Joseph evidently found a power that was not his own. Joseph had to work, I would think, to put down what his sinful nature was screaming at him to do to his brothers. Because over time Joseph had walked closer and closer to God and reflected upon who God is and the promises God had made to him, the promises that centered to his great-grandfather Abraham that all nations on earth would be blessed through the descendents of Abraham, the promises that centered in the Messiah. And in that promise, in that trust in God, he found a strength that I cannot begin to imagine. He found the strength to let his brothers live, to not exact revenge as he could have, and then when his brothers came with this message—we aren't told anywhere in scripture that Jacob actually said these things. I'm assuming he did, but for all I know, the brothers made it up. But you notice Joseph doesn't take and start beating them to say, "Is this actually what he said or are you making this up?" He takes their words of repentance at face value, right? Then when they come, these brothers throw themselves down at Joseph's feet and say, "We are your slaves;" he takes their acts of repentance at face value. He goes by what they say. And then he assures them that they are forgiven. He believes that they are repentant. He does exactly what we have been talking about the last two weeks now. He led his brothers to repentance and then he assured them that they were forgiven before God.

I don't know about you, but I can't honestly picture myself being as gracious as Joseph was. Think about what we are like at times. We come together in this congregation united in faith, right? We have the same confession, the same trust, in who our God is and what he has done for us. Yet, even within a tight-knit bonded-together group of Christians, do we still carry grudges against one another? Anyone ever sat at a meeting and not said a word when someone else said something and then went out the parking lot or down to a coffee shop and said, "Can you believe what that fool said?" Or go up and chew that person out later on when you didn't say a word at the meeting. The place where God would have you speak in brotherly love, you went out and said, "They, them and idiots" in the same sentence.

We have a tendency to not let go of grudges, don't we? If that's how we treat each other as the body of Christ, and at times unfortunately that is how we do, imagine also how we treat those who are not of the body of Christ. How you and I can carry a grudge longer than we can carry anything else. We might not work out all of our muscles all of the time, but the muscles that carry a grudge are pretty good with some of us, right? We don't love and forgive as we have been loved and forgiven.

It's like we talked about last week. If you weren't here last week, get on our website and listen to last week's sermon. Listen to it and think about what it says. Think about what God's Word is saying to us this week in the Gospel and in the First Lesson. Our God has forgiven us not just in the quality of removing our sins completely, but look at the quantity of what he has forgiven us, what Jesus is talking about today. If I'm only willing

to forgive others so many times and then no longer forgive them, then I'm asking God to judge me by that same standard. I don't know about you, but I don't want to do that because I know I'm at my limit and beyond. And I know every one of you are also because we are sinners. We sin against our God. We sin against one another. And when we recognize it, we throw ourselves at God's mercy seat and say, "Lord, for the sake of Jesus' life and death, the Jesus who never carried a grudge, the Jesus who took all my grudges to the cross, Lord, for His sake, forgive me." Do you really want God to say "No, sorry. You are at 999. No more forgiveness."

Of course not!—and God never will because His forgiveness is that pure and that absolute. And His forgiveness is what I believe empowered Joseph to stand and speak words of forgiveness to someone that I would find it hard. If I am sitting across the table from someone who committed a horrific crime against a member of my family, I don't know if I am going to be so gracious and speak kind and reassuring words. I pray God would give me the strength to do that. I pray also that I never have to face that situation.

But that's where Joseph was, isn't it? Isn't it amazing that he found the ability in the power of God, which is able to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine? He found the ability to do what I believe is incredible—to speak kind and reassuring words of love. One of the reasons is that he trusted that God had brought good out of what had happened. It didn't feel good all the way along. Being good doesn't mean everything is happy or hunky-dory. It means the God, who said "Let there be" and there was, is the God who is in control and He can bring good even out of heartache. He can bring good even out of hardship. He can bring good out of anything. He has promised us that. And He wants you and me to trust that.

He has brought about the good of taking away our sins, completely, fully and absolutely. And as we face heartache and hardship, if it leads us to walk closer to Him, hold His hand tighter and say, "Lord, help me! I can't get through this." It will be for our good. It might not be our earthly happiness, but it will be our eternal good.

When you and I can't see that, we need to believe that the God who loved us enough to die for us loves us enough to help us through the difficult times, loves us enough to be with us and strengthen us. And as we reflect on that love that He has for us, He will empower us to let go of those grudges, lose some grudge weight so that when we step on the scales of our bitterness, we are a little bit lighter and we aren't carrying it with us. Then we can act in love towards one another because we have been loved by God and each other has been loved by God and every person we meet has been loved by God.

That's what our God calls us to do. He has called us to be our brother's keeper. So grow in God's grace and knowledge so you can be your brother's keeper.