

Trinity 7 – Vicar Lehne Sermon  
Genesis 50:15–21: “Do Not Fear”

7/22/23; 7/23/23 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Dear Father in heaven, we are by nature sinful and unclean and do not deserve the mercies that you show us. Despite this, you love us anyway and sent your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins. Since you forgave us the sins that we committed against you, let us follow your example by forgiving the sins that others have committed against us. We pray all this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the fiftieth chapter of Genesis, beginning at the fifteenth verse. We read as follows in Jesus’ name:*

<sup>15</sup>When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” <sup>16</sup>So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: <sup>17</sup>‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup>His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” <sup>19</sup>But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup>As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup>So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who works all things out for our good, dear fellow redeemed:

Everyone loves a good revenge story. It is a popular genre for a reason. There is just something so satisfying about a villain getting what’s coming to him, and it never feels quite right if the villain gets off easy. However, while we can easily sympathize with the hero of these stories, have we ever considered what it is like to be in the villain’s shoes?

It's very hard to ever see ourselves as the villain in the narrative of our lives. Perhaps we convinced ourselves our villainy was for the greater good. We may like to think that we are not deserving of the revenge people want to dish out against us, but the unfortunate truth is that we have all sinned against other people. Therefore, knowing that we are all sinners, and knowing that everyone loves revenge, it only makes sense that there are times when we become scared of what others might do to us to get even when we sin against them. Even when we are repentant of the sins we have committed, it makes sense that we fear what others may do since we don't always know if they are willing to forgive us. However, in situations like those, we remember the words that Joseph said to his brothers: **“Do not fear. . . . (1) You meant evil against me, (2) but God meant it for good.”**

The account of Joseph is perfectly set up to be a good revenge story. Because Joseph was the favorite son and had dreams about his brothers and parents bowing down to him, Joseph's brothers became jealous of him. This, plus the fact that Joseph may have been a bit of a pain to live with, eventually ended with Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery in Egypt. His life was full of ups and downs in Egypt, but everything turned around for him when, after interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, he was not just put in charge of helping Egypt through a seven-year-long famine but was also made second in command of all Egypt.

Then, during the seven years of famine, who should show up to get grain from Egypt but Joseph's brothers? Joseph suddenly had the perfect opportunity to get his revenge against his brothers, and at first, it looked like he was going to. He tested his brothers in several different ways, culminating in him accusing their youngest brother, Benjamin, of stealing from him after planting his silver cup in his bag. In this moment, Joseph's brothers showed that they were repentant for what they had done to Joseph and had changed by saying that they would not go home without Benjamin. In addition, Judah offered to take Benjamin's place.

Joseph then revealed himself to his brothers and didn't get his revenge on them after all. However, when their father, Jacob (now called Israel), died, Joseph's brothers suddenly became scared of what Joseph might do to them. True, Joseph hadn't done anything to them so far, but they feared that the only reason why he hadn't was for the sake of their father. And now that their father was dead, there was no longer anything stopping Joseph from getting his revenge.

So, in order to prevent this potential outcome from happening, Joseph's brothers sent a message to him that said their father wanted Joseph to be told to forgive their sin, no doubt hoping that, if Joseph did only withhold his hand so far for the sake of their father, he would forgive them if it was their father's dying wish. In addition, they offered themselves up as slaves to Joseph. Since they sold him into slavery, maybe being his slaves would make up for what they did to him.

Now, put yourself in Joseph's shoes. If your family or friends had sold you into slavery for any reason, even something such as being a pain to live with, would you be willing to forgive them? If they showed that they were truly sorry for what they had done to you, would you be willing to let it go? Also, keep in mind that Joseph was second in command of all of Egypt. If you had power like Joseph had, would you withhold your hand from those who wronged you, or would you use it to get revenge on them? And if they willingly offered themselves up to be your servants, would you accept their offer or not?

When we think of how we would answer these questions, we must also keep in mind how often we want to get revenge for much less. All it takes is a broken promise, someone breaking something important to us, or someone treating us poorly. These are not necessarily small things, but compared to being sold into slavery, they are not as bad. Besides, many of us know what it is like to be stabbed in the back by someone. Can we honestly say that we never wanted to get back at them for what they did to us?

Now put yourself in the shoes of Joseph's brothers. We have all done things at the expense of others that we knew were wrong, and we were genuinely sorry for what we had done. When our friends told us a secret and asked us to keep it, we went and told others anyway. When we were in school, and we had an opportunity to climb the social ladder at the cost of disowning some of our friends, we did. When we were at work and we had an opportunity to get a raise or reach a better position in the company by playing dirty and bringing down our coworkers, we did.

But now imagine that these people we wronged basically had the power to do whatever they wanted without consequences. Would you expect them to forgive you? Would you live in

terror of what they could do to you? Would you be willing to do whatever it takes to get them to not enact their revenge against you, even if it meant lowering yourself to the lowest position there is as punishment for what you did? Whether it's at school, at work, or anywhere else, in moments like those, we often find ourselves fearing for our future and being willing to do whatever is necessary to prevent those outcomes.

We must face the facts: we have forgotten how to forgive. Sure, we may forgive our family or close friends when we think they deserve it, but isn't holding grudges and getting revenge against those who wronged us the "new" virtue of the world today? When was the last time we watched a movie about forgiveness?

Therefore, it made sense that Joseph's brothers had the fear that they did, and we would completely understand Joseph if he chose to get revenge on his brothers in this moment. In fact, we would probably find it to be a satisfying end to the account of Joseph's life. But what does Joseph do instead? He says to his brothers, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."

There are two parts of Joseph's response that are particularly interesting. The first is: "Am I in the place of God?" While it is extremely appealing to get revenge on all those who wrong us, Joseph realized something important: it was not his place to get revenge, even if his brothers were not repentant. As Paul says in Romans 12:19, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" Even though God could have chosen to unleash his wrath upon Joseph's brothers, he didn't. Instead, he chose to show mercy.

The second is: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Does this mean that it was the will of God that Joseph's brothers did evil? No, for God never wills evil. However, God is able to use even the evil that we do to bring about good. In this instance, he used the sin that Joseph's brothers committed, selling Joseph into slavery, in order to save the world from the seven years of famine and preserve the line of the Savior.

These two points point to something far more significant. While most men have to confess like Joseph that they are not in the place of God, and therefore, cannot carry out revenge, there was one man who was in the place of God: The God-man Jesus. After all, Jesus is God, so he alone could carry out revenge, and he certainly could have and would have been completely justified in doing so. But he didn't. Instead, he came to grant us forgiveness for all our sins. This ended up being the ultimate example of how God uses evil for good: God used the innocent death of his only begotten Son to bring about the forgiveness of sins for the whole world. On the cross, Jesus suffered the punishment that we deserved. Now, God no longer holds our sins against us, for they have all been paid for by his Son.

We therefore have no reason to fear. We do not have to fear people trying to get revenge against us, nor do we have to fear God getting against us and sending us into the fires of hell for all eternity. As Paul says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." No matter what we encounter in this life, God will work it out for our ultimate good, that ultimate good being granting us spiritual blessings and giving us eternal life in heaven.

Joseph's second part is no less significant. In addition to forgiving us for the ways that we wronged others, God promises to even work good from sins we have committed. Perhaps you are suffering today because you did something terrible in your life. You know God has forgiven you, but you can't forgive yourself. Know that you can take solace in this: While God

does not will the evil that you do, he can work good through it, just as God worked good through the evil of Joseph's brothers. To put it another way: God takes the lemons that we send out into the world and makes lemonade.

With all this in mind, let us follow Joseph's example. He did not get revenge on his brothers even though he had the power to do so, but rather, he forgave them, just like how God did not condemn us to the fires of hell but forgave us for the sake of his Son. It will not always be easy for us to do this, and if it were completely up to us, it would be impossible. It is only with God's help that we are able to resist our sinful desires for revenge, even though revenge is such an appealing thing. For this desire for revenge is only appealing to our sinful nature, which God has put to death through the waters of our baptism. To our new self, which God has raised up, it is appealing to reflect God and show forgiveness to all those who wrong us.

The account of Joseph does not make a good revenge story. Even though it had the perfect set up and everything seemed to come together to give Joseph the sweet taste of revenge, instead Joseph forgave his brothers, who showed that they were truly repentant for their sins. While this does not seem satisfying, it is the best possible ending. It shows us that no matter what we've done, we do not need to fear, for we have been forgiven by God, and he will work all things out for our good until the day comes when we enter into the gates of heaven where we will praise God for all eternity. Therefore, in the end, forgiveness proves to be far more heroic than revenge.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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