**Year A – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Genesis 50:15-21**

**October 1, 2017**

What Does Repentance Mean in Our Lives?

1. Repentance takes full responsibility (Vv15-17)
2. Repentance turns to God in hope (V18)
3. Repentance finds pardon and grace (Vv19-21)

Introduction

Many of you who lived through the 1960’s can confirm that it was a very volatile period in the history of our nation. The Vietnam War was in full swing, and people on both sides had strong opinions about the war. Much social change was happening, as walls that segregated minorities from whites were being broken down. Our nation was bitterly divided, with some change being good and other change being bad, and perhaps that sounds familiar for us living today in 2017.

But one of the things that also came out of the 1960s that had a profoundly negative impact on our culture, which continues to this day, was what people term the “sexual revolution”. Oh yes, sins against the 6th commandment have been going on since the fall into sin, but here in America they increased greatly in the 1960’s and beyond. “If it feels good, do it!” screamed the sexual revolution. And so, the result was a sharp increase in sexual activity outside of marriage, of children born out of wedlock, of abortion, of STD’s, of couples living together before marriage, of frivolous divorce, and so on. The result of all these things was many more broken homes, broken hearts, broken lives. And both the guilty and the innocent have been greatly harmed, and many have been trying to piece their lives together ever since.

Perhaps that describes some of us. We have been guilty of sexual sins or of any other sins, and have had to suffer the consequences of them. Our loved ones have had to suffer the consequences as well. We feel an immense amount of guilt for everything we have done. Or, perhaps some of us are innocent victims of somebody else’s sin. We were victimized by someone whose philosophy was, “If it feels good, do it!” And now we have to pick up the pieces and struggle to forgive that person.

What’s the answer? The answer is always found in the Word of God. The answer is always found in Jesus. And today we take a deep look at what repentance and forgiveness mean in our lives.

Setting the Scene

Perhaps you remember the story of Joseph. He was the son of Jacob, who had fathered the sons that would one day be the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob himself, the father of Joseph, had been the object of favoritism as a child. His mother Rebekah favored him, while his father Isaac favored his brother Esau. Isaac had intended to go against the Lord’s will and give the birthright to Esau because Esau was his favorite. So Jacob and his mother Rebekah hatched a plan that tricked Isaac into giving Jacob the birthright. Esau was enraged at Jacob for tricking Isaac out of giving Esau the birthright, and Jacob had to flee for his life.

After fleeing, Jacob himself would be tricked by his own father-in-law into marrying the woman he had never intended to marry. So Jacob ended up with more than one wife, which was not according to God’s will for marriage. He favored his wife Rachel over and above his wife Leah, and favored the children that Rachel bore. One of those children was Joseph.

He gifted Joseph with a very fancy robe, and Joseph’s brothers hated him for it. They ganged up on him and sold into slavery in Egypt. To cover their tracks, they then lied to their father Jacob, telling him that a wild animal had killed Joseph. Those of you who have children can understand that a parent never fully gets over the death of a child. And so, thinking Joseph was dead, Jacob mourned the death of Joseph all the decades Joseph had been in Egypt.

Meanwhile, Joseph’s life in Egypt was interesting, full of ups and downs. He rose to the point of being second in command of all of Egypt. By his God-given ability to interpret dreams, he was able to prepare the land of Egypt for 7 years of famine that were coming, which no one else would have predicted. When those 7 years came, Egypt had more than enough food, and peoples from all over the world came to Egypt for food—including Joseph’s brothers and eventually his father Jacob as well. He was reunited with his father after many years, and the family moved there, and lived in housing that Joseph provided for them.

But in today’s lesson, his father Jacob has died, and his brothers are scared that Joseph will take revenge on them now.

Part 1: Repentance takes full responsibility (Vv15-17)

The lesson begins, “When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’ When their message came to him, Joseph wept.’”

Throughout Joseph’s years in Egypt, he showed no signs of ill will toward his brothers. Even when they later came to Egypt and entered his presence, hoping to purchase food, he still showed no animosity. But they know that Joseph is now second in command in Egypt, the most powerful country in the world, and he can do whatever he wants with them. With their father Jacob dead, they think that nothing could hold Joseph back anymore from possibly having them executed.

And so they take full responsibility for their previous sins against him. They call their transgressions “sins” and “wrongs”. They had wronged their brother, and they confess it.

And as we approach God, friends, we do the same. We make no excuses. At the beginning of today’s worship service, we said to the Lord, “In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child.” God could do anything he wants to do with us, just as Joseph could have done anything he wanted with his brothers. What would have been fair would have been for Joseph to treat his brothers poorly, sell them as slaves. That is what they deserved; that would have been fair. What would have been fair for God to do to us would have been to send us to hell for our sins. That is what we deserved; that is fair. And so we take full responsibility for our sins. We lay them at God’s feet. We turn to him alone for any kind of hope.

Part 2: Repentance turns to God in hope (V18)

The brothers did the same thing with Joseph. They turned to Joseph for hope. They came and threw themselves down before him, “We are your slaves,” they said. They would rather be slaves to Joseph than be maybe tortured and killed by him. They would even consider slavery to Joseph to be a blessing! Please, just give us this bit of grace! Let us be your slaves!

So often we take the complete opposite attitude toward God. Our attitude isn’t, “Lord, I deserve nothing from you! I’ll throw myself at your mercy and gladly accept every last bit of grace you give me!” Rather our attitude is often to cross our arms and complain to God, saying, “What have you done for me lately, God? There is so much pain and suffering in the world and in my life, why should I turn to you? Worshipping you every Sunday is just soooo inconvenient for me; I’d rather sleep. I can’t see you anyway, therefore I wonder if you even exist!”

And we forget a few things. One is that God has done e*verything* for you lately. He is the one who made sure your heart kept beating today and your lungs kept breathing. And pain and suffering aren’t his fault; those only entered the world after mankind sinned. As for our complaints about worshipping him being inconvenient, well, let’s just say his crucifixion for us was also pretty inconvenient for him. We deserve nothing from him! We would be thrilled to simply be his slaves! That is far better than the hell we deserve!

Yet he gives us so much more. He doesn’t call us his slaves; he calls us his saints. His holy ones. He has prepared homes in us for heaven. He portrays our future as being one in which we enjoy our white robes of holiness and righteousness in heaven with him forevermore. He says the righteous will shine like the stars for eternity.

Yes, as we throw ourselves at his feet, seeking his mercy, he gives us his mercy. He gives us forgiveness. He gives us peace. He gives us an eternity in heaven, living and reigning with him forevermore as His people.

Part 3: Repentance finds pardon and grace (Vv19-21)

We find pardon and grace in Jesus. And Joseph, who was very familiar with God’s grace, gave his brothers pardon and grace as well. “Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.’”

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. Many lives have been saved because you sold me into Egypt.” I was able to prepare the land for the famine, storing up grain during the years of plenty, so that during the lean years Egypt could not just survive but could also share with her neighbors. I forgive you.

Those are the sweetest words you can possibly hear, aren’t they? After you have wronged someone so deeply and so painfully that you feel as though your relationship with them is crushed forever, and they say to you, “I forgive you,” The suffocating load of guilt is lifted from your shoulders. You can breathe and function again.

As you come to worship today, you again hear, “Your sins are forgiven. God does not hold them against you. Go in peace with God.” There isn’t a single sin you have committed that has not been forgiven and washed away in the blood of Christ. There isn’t a single sin you have committed that was not washed away in the waters of your baptism, as Gentry’s sins were also washed away today. Now go in peace, forgiving one another as well.

Conclusion

Those of you who were in Bible Class last week heard about the power of forgiveness. A lack of forgiveness in someone’s life can lead them into all sorts of damaging behaviors. When someone wrongs someone else and hasn’t been forgiven by that person, or when someone wrongs God and feels as though God could never forgive them for being such a terrible sinner, they often respond by trying to avoid or numb the guilt and the pain.

And so, someone who formerly had everything going for them doesn’t feel forgiven by a loved one and so starts to abuse drugs or alcohol. Someone who was once a faithful church attender commits a sin so grievous that he or she stops attending church because in their heart of hearts they think there is no way God and his church can forgive them. Or it goes the other direction—someone who was hurt deeply by a loved one that they used to trust, and maybe it was the kind of deep hurt that happened in childhood or in one’s formative years, the person who was hurt deeply struggles to forgive the other person who ruined his life.

Maybe one of these scenarios describes you. And you’ve tried to deal with the pain, have maybe even turned to destructive, sinful behaviors in your attempts to deal with the pain.

Look with me right now at that cross. Oh sure, ours is nicely sanded, stained, and attractive. Picture it as a rough cross, with your Savior on it. See your Savior bleeding and dying on that cross. See his sorrow.

But also see his love. See his forgiveness. That forgiveness is for YOU! That heaven that he is winning on that cross is for you! Those times you have sinned so terribly against other people, those times you have sinned so terribly against your Lord, forgiven. Forgotten. You live in peace with the almighty God now and forever.

Now live in that peace by forgiving one another. St. Paul says in Ephesians, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Your Lord doesn’t hold your sin against you. He took it on himself to create peace between you and him by suffering and dying for you. Now he says, forgive and make peace with those who have wronged you as well. And you will find a peace and joy in forgiveness beyond what you could have imagined.

That is what repentance does for us. It takes full responsibility for our wrongs. It turns to God in hope. It finds pardon and grace. And it gives pardon and grace. In short, repentance changes your life. It gives you peace with God and each other. Live in that peace. Amen.