

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Forgiving Yourself

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 33:1-11 (NRSVUE)

¹ Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." ⁶ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸ Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." ⁹ But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." ¹⁰ Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand, for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, since you have received me with such favor. ¹¹ Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

Bible/Sermon Focus

It is St. Anselm of Canterbury who is attributed with defining theology as "faith seeking understanding." Anselm was careful to propose that one must begin with faith, before moving on to the "seeking understanding." Broadly theology means to speak or think about God. When we think about God, we are doing theology. Anselm's definition moves still today through academic settings, and in our everyday lives. While sitting in one-on-one coffees with young people I am often asked "but how do you know that what you think about God is true?" Theologically, this question is not one that I tend ask. The truth of God can only be known through Jesus and encounters with the Holy Ghost (and the way those act through scripture, experience, reasoning, and tradition) and we don't exactly have a scale to measure the "truth" of something. A question, I ask instead is, "If there is a God, and that God is good and worthy of our worship than what does that God look like? How does that God function?"

I have faith in the God revealed in Jesus. And I want to better understand everyday how to live into that faith. The *how* of our faith can be equally practical as it is charismatic feeling embodied in our flesh. Praxis matters. Praxis is taking theory and putting it into practice.

Theology can be fun, but done with faithful intention it can also save lives, transform communities and people. The Good News of Jesus Christ is meant to *really* be good news! It's supposed to change the world. Loving our neighbor with our feelings matters, but it also matters *how* we love our neighbors; what we actually do to support those in our community.

Theologian Amy Barbour writes, "The failure of love is often the failure of the human imagination. The failure of Christians to love is often the failure of theological imagination." And when it comes to topics like forgiveness, this rings so true! Our ability to forgive ourselves and to witness to ourselves as a forgiven person is deeply intertwined with our witness of a God who is capable and willing to extend such grace to us.

Forgiving ourselves does not mean that we condone our own behavior, or that we believe others should, or even God. Even in our scripture from today we know that Jacob doesn't condone his own behavior. He tries to cover for it by paying his brother off. Forgiveness and grace can resonate through us reminding us that even though we are sinners we have not lost value. We are still beloved by God. We still have worth. We still have much to offer and, it is coupled with the humbling realization that we are not perfect, nor do we have to be. In the words of Cole Arthur Riley, "This I believe. That I come from pain as much as beauty. And I don't have to make the pain beautiful in order to get free."

We humans are imperfect, broken, beings. And the good news is that God still uses us, and with God, amazing things happen even through us, yes even us. And when we get to experience a moment of justifying grace in our lives, we feel *and* know that we are forgiven and loved by God, yes us, even us.

Forgiving ourselves is about forgiving who we are right now. You tomorrow, you ten pounds lighter, you with six more ounces of patience, you healthier, you more well rested...none of these things will make you more or less worthy of forgiveness in the amazing grace of God. You're already in. Imagine that.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you see the ability to forgive oneself wrapped up in our ability to believe that God could forgive us?
2. Reflect on this quote from Amy Barbour, "The failure of love is often the failure of the human imagination. The failure of Christians to love is often the failure of theological imagination."
3. What was the scariest theology you've been taught about God?
4. Reflect on this quote from Nadia Bolz-Weber, "forgiveness is nothing less than an act of fidelity to an evil-combating campaign...Forgiveness is about being a freedom fighter. And free people are dangerous people. Free people aren't controlled by the past. Free people laugh more than others. Free people see beauty where others do not. Free people are not easily offended. Free people are unafraid to speak truth to stupid. Free people are not chained to resentment. That's worth fighting for. There really is a light that shines in the darkness, and that the darkness cannot, will not, shall not, overcome it."
5. How do you experience freedom in Christ?

Prayer

God of Forgiveness, Remind us that we are your beloved children and that we have purpose and meaning. Teach us to better forgive ourselves so we can transform the church and the world for your good. Let us experience the freedom of your grace. **Amen.**

"I don't know if liberation depends on our reconciliation with others, but I am certain it at least depends on our reconciliation with ourselves. In this life it is all we can do to stay whole—an interior unity. We owe that to ourselves." - Cole Arthur Riley