

Men's Night – March 6, 2023
Genesis 27:1-45

“Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you” (Genesis 27:42). Now that's a window into the heart of man. I don't know who to feel sorrier for here. Esau totally got burned. The older brother was burned by his mother AND his younger brother. Have you ever been burned? What Rebecca said to Jacob is the whirlwind that she wrought by being a conniving meddler. Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Esau is licking his wounds and, according to Rebecca, is lifting his spirits by dreaming of putting Jacob six feet under. That's a dark place. Jacob's name stems from a Hebrew idiom for deceptive behavior. I've been swindled. I don't like it. I've been swindled by friends with drug addictions, low-life contractors, strangers who wanted to get ahead at my expense – the world sometimes feels like a perpetual game of Three-Card-Monte and I'm the mark.

Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). Peacemaker; what do you think of when you hear the word? Do you think of yourself as a reconciling agent between two parties in conflict? Do you think that God means that, primarily, you are to be a peacemaker in your own life, to be an active agent to resolve conflict in a way that pleases Him? St. Paul wrote this about peacemaking: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13). What about Esau? What was important to Esau after Jacob thieved his blessing? Anger, pride, a profound sense of loss – it all swirled in Esau's heart and it blended into a cocktail of vengeance. Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Is that what the Pharisees thought? Did they console themselves with the thought of spilling Jesus' blood?

The chief priests were beside themselves with anger. The crowds that followed Jesus were doing all that they could to see not only Jesus but Lazarus too (John 12:9). Lazarus, the dead brother of Mary and Martha, the four-day-dead fellow from Bethany, the crowd wanted to see this man that the Lord had raised from the dead and the chief priests seethed with anger. So blinded by their hate, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus (John 12:10). If there is anything antithetical to being a peacemaker, it is the notion that we console ourselves with thoughts of murder, vengeance, extracting a pound of flesh from any who cross us, any who demean or belittle us. Listen to this bit from the book of Hebrews: “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled” (Hebrews 12:14-15).

A “root of bitterness;” what do you suppose that is? The old saying goes, holding onto anger, resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the person that you are angry with to die; like drinking rat poison and expecting the rat to die. A root of bitterness is entrenched in an unforgiving heart. If you perpetually rehearse the harm that another person has done to you, a consequence may be a root of bitterness. Even Christians think that not forgiving someone is an act of punishment which the other person deserves, an act of punishment that will impress on them the gravity of their mistake. Some folks believe that not forgiving the person who harmed

you is a way to validate your pain, to validate the gravity of their sin. Is that even close to a Biblical notion?

You are a man. By your very nature, you are a leader. There is nothing more important about you than the fact that you are a Christian. Christians are to be known by their confession of faith, a deep and unassailable commitment to the Lord Christ, His cross, His grace, His blood, His church, His Word, and His forgiveness. All this is yours. Christians are also to be known by their character. Forgiving others is part of our character, a noble and permanent and blessed part of our character. Jesus told a memorable and terrible parable about a man who didn't forgive. It was told for me; it was told for you.

A guy had an astronomical debt which he accumulated with the King. The King wants to settle accounts and calls in this lowlife to pony up his bill. The guy begs for time, promising what he could never actually deliver. The King, astonishingly, forgives the debt and cuts the fellow loose. The dirt bag sees a fellow servant who owes him a couple of bucks and goes ballistic, even choking the fellow servant. Other servants of the King see this whole thing unfold and they tell the King who is justifiably enraged. What's the point? The point is that every time you sin, no matter what human being you sin against, you sin against God. Every time! In Christ, God forgave you. A huge debt; a debt you can't possibly calculate. And then you think that it's legitimate for you not to forgive someone who sins against you? When you behave in this way you not only soil yourself but you besmirch God's character.

Forgiveness is setting someone free from their debt, cancellation of their debt, release from captivity, clemency, pardon from the punishment that is associated with their offense. Where would you be without God's forgiveness? Can you imagine God consoling Himself with thoughts of killing you? Do you see the craven thoughts of Esau in the Lord Christ? He knew what it would take. Jesus had no illusions about the cross and its pain, about bearing the sin of humanity and the pain, about enduring the Father's wrath against sin and the pain. He asked His Father to take the cup from Him, but Jesus emphasized that it was the Father's will that is foremost. Forgiveness is the Father's will. By that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10). Forgiveness, full and free, is yours. Christ's blood has stamped your sin ledger "paid in full." Christ's blood has set you free. Forgiven is the word that is spoken from the cross. Forgiven is the word that is spoken in absolution. Forgiven is the word that is spoken in your baptism. Forgiven is the word that is spoken in Holy Communion. How blessed you are; how well loved by the Father you are!

When Jacob next saw Esau, he was terrified. Jacob offered his brother a bribe for his forgiveness. "I will pacify him with these gifts" (Genesis 32:20 – NIV). Maybe he won't kill me when he sees me if I give him enough presents. There was no need. Esau told Jacob to keep his goats (Genesis 33:9). When Esau saw Jacob he ran to his brother and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept (Genesis 33:4). That's us. That's Christian men. That's the brotherhood we share. That is the unity and the allegiance to one another that the blood of Christ engenders (Psalm 133). He is the elder brother who gives us the free gift of His forgiveness.