

*Shiloh United Methodist Church*

Genesis 32:3-8, 33:1-11

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*Unlearning Forgiveness*

Genesis 32:3-8 Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>3</sup> Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau, toward the land of Seir, the open country of Edom. <sup>4</sup> He gave them these orders: “Say this to my master Esau. This is the message of your servant Jacob: ‘I’ve lived as an immigrant with Laban, where I’ve stayed till now. <sup>5</sup> I own cattle, donkeys, flocks, men servants, and women servants. I’m sending this message to my master now to ask that he be kind.’”

<sup>6</sup> The messengers returned to Jacob and said, “We went out to your brother Esau, and he’s coming to meet you with four hundred men.”

<sup>7</sup> Jacob was terrified and felt trapped, so he divided the people with him, and the flocks, cattle, and camels, into two camps. <sup>8</sup> He thought, If Esau meets the first camp and attacks it, at least one camp will be left to escape.

Genesis 33:1-11 Common English Bible (CEB)

**33** Jacob looked up and saw Esau approaching with four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two women servants. **2** He put the servants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Joseph last. **3** He himself went in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times as he was approaching his brother. **4** But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed

him, and they wept. **5** Esau looked up and saw the women and children and said, “Who are these with you?”

Jacob said, “The children that God generously gave your servant.” **6** The women servants and their children came forward and bowed down. **7** Then Leah and her servants also came forward and bowed, and afterward Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed.

**8** Esau said, “What’s the meaning of this entire group of animals that I met?”

Jacob said, “To ask for my master’s kindness.”

**9** Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what’s yours.”

**10** Jacob said, “No, please, do me the kindness of accepting my gift. Seeing your face is like seeing God’s face, since you’ve accepted me so warmly. **11** Take this present that I’ve brought because God has been generous to me, and I have everything I need.” So Jacob persuaded him, and he took it.

Over the next month we will be exploring forgiveness. We are taking a whole month to dive into this for 2 reasons: 1. We are entering a contentious year for us as a nation and church. I believe as your pastor that it is my job to root myself and this congregation in deeply rooted Christian principles. Forgiveness is one of those. Going back to the teachings of Jesus and others I will share today. 2. This is one of the most important life skills we can learn to stay centered in the love of God, Jesus taught it and we serve ourselves and the world better by learning a skill that benefits us in so many ways.

Forgiveness is a deeply held Christian belief, but I think for many of us we have picked up a lot of knowledge about forgiveness from popular culture.

How many of you have heard the phrase “Forgive and Forget”?

Most of you have. For me this phrase is not rooted in the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, or even human nature.

For one thing we are not wired as humans to simply forget things. Things that demand forgiveness are things that have hurt us. Our brains are wired to remember pain, so that we don't do the painful thing again. When we met a predator that attacked us in the wild, we were programmed to remember that encounter so we either do not go back into that territory or can defend ourselves the next time it happens.

In the Bible forgetfulness is not a virtue, it is why we are a people based in story. We believe the traditions of the past, the experience of today, and the dreams of tomorrow all flow together in God's story.

Jesus in the stories we study, never said, “Forget about it.” He constantly reminded people to learn from their current point and move ahead.

There is a place that Christians talk about forgiveness every week, if we still hear what we say. Where is it?

The Lord's Prayer. “Forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” There is something powerful in that prayer about first recognizing God's greatness, allowing God to shape us, give us enough, and then recognizing that we have to be forgiven and forgive to live into this. The interesting thing about forgiveness for Christians is it is rooted in the Lord's prayer found in Matthew and Luke which are both different than what we say Sunday. Forgiveness is an ancient part of what it means to be transformed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Interestingly enough, on this Sunday called Epiphany in the church calendar, when traditionally we celebrate the wise men bringing gifts to Jesus, one of the gifts Frankincense is associated heavily with forgiveness. God forgiving, us forgiving others it seems interesting how much forgiveness is a value so deeply rooted in our tradition.

For many of us though, I think we have gone outside the tradition to find answers to do forgiveness because we have not talked about the how to of forgiveness in church. Our culture that would almost like to make forgiveness a prescription kind of like this:

(Link to forgiveness spot)

It doesn't quite work like that. Forgiveness has to happen in relationships, it doesn't just magically make things better like those drug commercials always seem like prescription will do for us. However, Jesus and our forbearers in the faith believed it was part of transformation. So much that they kept in the earliest form of the Lord's prayer we have in its complete form, in a document called the Didache of early Christian teachings.

Let's turn to our scripture story for today to learn more about forgiveness.

Tell Story of Jacob and Essau

Birthright

Stew for brother when hungry, (hangry) – not much wealth at this point, teenagers

Stew for father Isaac

Today's scripture, between the two Jacob wrestles with God and even gets renamed...ponder.

Meeting...splitting of party safety

-Not about placing ourselves in positions to be hurt more, but we also have to be vulnerable to allow forgiveness to really happen. New boundaries have to be established after a hurt has occurred, and hoping it will work itself out is rarely how it works. Jacob kinda puts women and children out front, so we need to talk about that.

-accepting gift as Jacob's way of owning up

Their story is important because Jacob had to turn back into a relationship he thought was dead, and in so doing God transformed Jacob into a life of reconciliation. Jacob was reformed, renamed to Israel before this could all happen, a new birth happened.

Funny Jesus talked about new birth.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/on-the-road-innocent-michigan-man-ends-up-working-alongside-crooked-cop-that-locked-him/>

Park situation

Teamed up for coffee shop

Race issues here, political issues...responsibility issues

Turning into relationships is the key point here, new boundaries and shifting into that reality.

Changing relationship to change the world, being transformed for God's purposes of remaking the world. Forgiveness is part of that in the early church.

Christianity is the tradition of being remade, through the practices of our faith.

So perhaps for us as Christians it is, “Forgive and be reformed.” Be remade by God, and the new boundaries of the relationships through which you see God working in your life.

Today I would like to end our sermon with a prayer I invite the congregations I serve each year on the first Sunday to recite. It is the John Wesley’s covenant prayer, rewritten for today. It is a prayer that fits the idea of transformation and to letting God reform us.