

Class Notes

April 13, 2016

Never Too Late: Handout Set 12

Here we are at the end of our study. We have talked of small grievances which can be resolved relatively easily if we communicate, clarify, and extend/accept a genuine apology. Even these small misunderstandings or slights can, however, grow to unresolved grudges and alienation if not attended to.

The Growing Importance of Apologies

From On Apology

By Aaron Lazare

One of the most profound human interactions is the offering and accepting of apologies. Apologies have the power to heal humiliations and grudges, remove the desire for vengeance, and generate forgiveness on the part of the offended parties. For the offender, they can diminish the fear of retaliation and relieve the guilt and shame that can grip the mind with a persistence and tenacity that are hard to ignore. The result of the apology process, ideally, is the reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships.

Most people, if asked, will tell you stories of grudges that have destroyed important relationships and, in some instances, have even torn families and friends apart. The offenses that lead to these grudges range from events such as failing to visit a friend in a hospital or not attending a wedding or funeral to betrayals of trust and public humiliations. An effective apology at the time might have prevented the grudge, and a belated apology, months, years, or even decades later, might have effected reconciliation.

We can experience significant wrongs at the hands of another that involve deep wounds and ongoing rifts. Even in these, however, there is hope for healing, whether it be healing in my heart allowing me to go on even if the other person never acknowledges the wrong OR whether there be actual apology and changed behavior.

As a final exercise, I would like you to review two Old Testament stories that we alluded to in earlier weeks: Jacob and Esau; and Joseph and his brothers.

Jacob and Esau

(Genesis 25: 20-34; Chapter 27:1-45; Chapters 32-33)

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were blessed by a son in their old age after they had given up hope that God's promise of descendants would come true. This son, Isaac, later married Rebekah, and they had

twin sons: Esau and Jacob. Earlier in our study, we talked about the favoritism of Isaac toward Esau and Rebekah toward Jacob and the resulting sibling rivalry and alienation that occurred. After Rebekah helped Jacob steal Esau's due blessing (as firstborn),

Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Now then my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides. When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there."

Over 20 years later (see Genesis 31:38), Jacob was tired of the frustrations he had in the land of his father-in-law – where he had fled – and God told him to go back to the "land of your fathers and relatives, and I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3). Chapter 32 describes the predictable fear Jacob had, having wronged his brother years previously, and the uncertainty he had regarding what kind of reception would await him. Would Esau still want to kill him?

Read Genesis 32:3-21.

1. How did Jacob feel? (Genesis 32: 6-7)
2. What are 4 things he did in preparation for meeting his brother?
 - a. Genesis 32:7-8; 33: 1-2
 - b. Genesis 32:9-12;
 - c. Genesis 32: 13-21
 - d. Genesis 33:3
3. How did Esau react? (Genesis 33: 4-9)
4. Write out verse 33:10 describing how Jacob felt when he knew he truly was forgiven.

In spite of his deception in stealing his brother's blessing, Jacob encountered forgiveness and reconciliation. Details are not given regarding what happened in Esau's thoughts and attitudes, but distance, time, his own success, and faith must have softened his heart and enabled him to forgive his brother. This is a beautiful description of forgiveness and restored relationships. This does not always play itself out in families, but God giving us record of Jacob's guilt and Esau's forgiveness can instill hope and motivation in our hearts. Although Jacob's motivation in this case was self-serving, he was still welcomed by his brother.

In spite of this experience, knowing what damage favoritism caused in his own family of origin, Jacob, now called Israel, went on to repeat the behavior!! He had a favorite wife (Rachel) and a favorite son (Joseph – see Genesis 37:3) Once again, a favorite son alienated his brothers. Earlier we read how Joseph baited his brothers and how Jacob's preference toward Joseph created anger and envy (Genesis 37). They sold him to passing merchants, and chapters 38 through 42 describe Joseph's fascinating experience. When you have time, review this whole story. Because of famine in the land where Joseph's father and brothers lived and because Joseph had been placed in a position of managing the food resources of Egypt, his brothers ended up coming to him for help **37 years after they had sold him into slavery**. They did not recognize him immediately, but Joseph recognized them. In chapter 45, we are told how Joseph finally made himself known to his brothers, and how he was able to say that God used his experiences for good. He brought his brothers and widowed father to Egypt (47:11). The story has a "nice ending" and is an encouragement that our difficult situations can also work out in the way described in Romans 8:28).

But wait a minute! Jacob, the father of these 12 boys eventually died. (See Genesis 49:33). They had lived peacefully in Egypt together for 17 years (47:28). By this time, if my math is correct, Joseph was 71 years old. He was 17 when his brothers sold him.

Read Genesis 50:15-21. What did Joseph's brothers fear after their father had died? What did they do?

It seems like they had never actually asked for forgiveness until now!!

How did Joseph respond to their concerns?

Let the stories Esau and Joseph's hurts, the time that it must have taken to process them, and the eventual healing speak to your hearts. In terms of problems in relationships, there is nothing new under

the sun! It is never too late to seek forgiveness, and with God's help, it is never too late to forgive. Don't be afraid to take the first step if God prompts you. Remember, forgiving is God's work in our heart. It is not something we accomplish on our own.

Some final words from one of my favorite books on forgiveness, Helping People Forgive, by David Augsburger:

The choice to forgive arises from within...Forgiveness is not simply the freeing of oneself from being held hostage by bitterness, grief, or anger, although forgiveness does give the gift of freedom. Nor is it the resolution of exhausted emotions, the fatigue of tired memory, or the finishing of discharged emotions, although forgiveness does require a time of withdrawal, reflection, remembering, and gradual release. It is, instead a clear, present transaction that finishes past situations of failure, forgoes future mistrust and suspicion of betrayal [caution – sometimes boundaries essential and renewed relationship not safe], and forgives in an act of acceptance, grounded in whatever repentance is possible for either or both. (pp. 116-117)

Forgiveness is a gift from God: His forgiveness of me and His enabling me to forgive another.

Bibliography

The Bible, a concordance, and a dictionary were my primary references and absolutely the most definitive.

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The Lutheran Hour Sermon Text

"Reconciled Reconcilers"

#83-27

Presented on The Lutheran Hour on March 6, 2016

By Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, Lutheran Hour Speaker

(Q&A Topic: What is the Best Way to Solve a Conflict with Someone in My Life?)

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Text: 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-19).

Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed. Hallelujah! Amen!

On May 13, 1981, Pope John Paul II was greeting crowds in St. Peter's Square. Children and adults clamored to catch his eye. As he rode in his car surrounded by security guards, four shots rang out. Someone had just tried to kill him. The bullets penetrated his torso and right arm and grazed his left index finger.

It didn't take long for the would-be assassin to be apprehended. Mehmet Ali Agca had escaped from a Turkish prison where he was being held for the murder of a journalist. His motive for trying to kill the Pontiff was a mystery, but his murderous intent was clear.

Less than a year and a half later, Pope John Paul, now fully recovered from the shooting, decided to visit Agca. Clothed in his papal robes, John Paul entered the prison in Rome and sat with the young criminal in the corner of his barren cell. What did Pope John Paul do? How did he respond to the violent attempt on his life? What was his reaction to the man who wanted to see him dead?

He forgave him. He entrusted the final judgment of this man's actions to Jesus. He let it go.

You might be thinking, "Well, that's the pope. He's supposed to forgive." You might be thinking, "My life is a different story. It's not as easy for me."

In fact, some feelings of hurt may be lingering in your life right now. Perhaps you have gaping wounds in your relationships, a truckload of trial that affects you every day.

Lewis Smedes, author of a book called Forgive and Forget, talked about the

deep and abiding difficulty of relationship damage. He said, "It is always personal, unfair, and deep."

There are many people today wandering around today wounded. You may be one of them. So, the real question is, is there hope? Is there hope for me, for you? Is there hope for your heart if you've been hurt by a significant other, betrayed by a friend, disappointed by a parent, or harmed by a hurtful person? How can you live well when relationships in your life are in shambles?

You might say that today relationship raggedness runs rampant because of real hurts. It can lodge in your life and not let you go. The pain, the bitterness, and, yes, even the hatred, can take over your life. It can become who you are as a human being. Maybe you're at that point as you know no other life but one of lingering sadness, constant thoughts of revenge, or empty hopelessness. How can you be freed from what seems to be a seemingly inevitable, impenetrable prison?

Smedes gave the answer in his book. It's not easy to hear. It may not be fully understood, but hear him and give this message a chance in your life. He said, "When you feel this kind of three-dimensional pain, you have a wound that can only be healed by forgiving the one who wounded you" (p.5).

Wait a minute. Healed only by forgiving? That doesn't seem fair. That seems like you're letting a no-good culprit off the hook!

Before you reject this daring statement, let me explain. Forgiveness does not mean being unfair or letting someone "get away with it." It means there is another way for you when you are wounded by someone.

God calls it "reconciliation." Listen to the Apostle Paul speak in 2 Corinthians, chapter five: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-19).*

The Biblical word for "reconciliation" is rooted in a word that means "to transform." It's connected with a word that tells us there is something else. On the one hand there's the old way that you and I expect, but on the other hand God has a surprise of grace. This other way was given as a gift by means of what God did through His Son, Jesus. You heard the Apostle Paul say it: God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. He was reconciling the whole world to Himself. How did that work? He didn't count our sins against us, but instead, counted them against Jesus when Jesus was put to death on the cross.

Every thought, word, action, accident, slip-up, bad attitude, disobedience, and sin that you and I have ever committed against our Creator, the Holy God, was piled on Jesus Who was punished in our place. The price was paid. God made another way where there was no way. It was a way of justice-sin was punished. But it was a way of righteousness that made possible a new way of grace. God gave us love we didn't deserve. God reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ. Instead of destroying us or leaving us to suffer in our anger or pain, God forgave us in Christ. He let it all go because Jesus took it upon Himself.

Here's a truth that you can take to the bank. God is much better at taking care of

hurt and injury, pain and sin, than we are. All we know is payback, retribution, and the joy of seeing others suffer as much as we think we're suffering. All we know is self-destruction and slavery to woundedness. God came up with a plan that was totally different. He created the possibility, no, the reality of reconciliation and forgiveness: handing over all your personal, unfair, and deep pain to Him and letting Him carry it for you.

Hal Elrod discovered this gift in a very personal way. When he was just twenty years old, he was driving home after giving a dynamic speech at a sales meeting. Hal was on cloud nine. The crowd at the gathering gave him his first standing ovation. Driving home on the freeway in his new Ford Mustang, feeling like he had the world by the tail; suddenly, a drunk driver in a large pick-up truck sped toward him going the wrong way. He hit Hal's car head-on. The airbag deployed, but Hal's car spun sideways in the opposite direction of oncoming traffic. Another car hit the driver's side of his vehicle, crushing the door and pinning Hal inside. It took first responders an hour to extricate Hal from the vehicle. Because of his injury and blood loss, Hal's heart stopped beating for six minutes as rescuers tried to revive him.

It looked as if all was lost, but thankfully the medical team got his heart beating again. Hal was a broken and seriously injured young man though. The doctors told his parents that he experienced severe brain damage, he had multiple broken bones, and he had serious internal injuries. If he survived, they said, he probably wouldn't ever walk again.

But three weeks after the incident, Hal, with lots of help, took his first steps. Today Hal is an author and a speaker. How did that happen? Well, considering the physical healing; there's many reasons. But the emotional; it's simple and it's powerful. Hal found another way. Instead of letting hatred, bitterness, and disappointment grow over his lot in life, Hal remembered, "If you can't change it, don't let it run your life. Take five minutes to grieve, complain, and moan. Then let it go." But Paul does even better than that. He says, "Then, give it all over to Christ, the crucified, risen One and leave it all in His hands!"

That's the power of forgiveness. This is the life-saving gift of reconciliation. There is an option to grudges, anger, resentment, and paralyzing pain. God gives you another way. In fact, God Himself had to literally create this other way!

And that's why Paul says, *"Therefore, weambassadors for Christ....implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

That's how it works. Jesus became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. If you and I were on our own, we would have no place to put the pain and damage of our relationships. But we're not on our own. God the Father sent His only Son to carry the pain and damage for you and me. Instead of having to live a life twisted and misshapen by emotional pain-a wronged life, God gives you a right life-one that is marked by His loving embrace, the forgiveness of your sins, and the capacity in Him to share His love with others.

So, let's get practical today. Let's apply this to your own regrets, and guilt, and shame. What do you do with the genuine hurt and pain you've caused? What do

you do with your mistakes in life? How do you handle the things that you can't undo anymore? You can't do anything, but Christ can, and in Him you are a new creation. The old is gone because of Him; the new has come because of Him. You were crucified with Christ and raised to new life because of your baptism in Him. You can't do anything, but God did everything in Jesus for you! The old is gone.

Now, the devil is going to try to whisper accusations from your past. The evil one will try to convince you that you can't be a new person in Christ. But with a spirit of humility, repentance, and gratitude, you can respond, "Jesus gave me another way," and by faith, I'm going to live that new life in Him. Live as one reconciled to God, forgiven. Let your Savior keep taking away the poisonous grudges and regrets that try to clog your heart and mind. Let your Redeemer and your friend, Jesus, give you the strength to apologize to people you've hurt. Let God make His appeal through you-His appeal for another way given as a gift through Jesus Christ.

People will see the difference in you. Instead of beating yourself up and isolating yourself from others, you'll humbly start brand new. You'll have a sense of peace. Even if some relationships can't be rebuilt, you, yourself, can be a powerful witness for the transformation God works through His gift of reconciliation. You can show people in your life that there is hope.

Please know, dear listener, that as you live this other way, this way of reconciliation through Christ, you're going to need God's Word to sustain you every day. You'll need your fellow forgiven followers of Jesus to encourage you. But take your first steps in that new life in Him. God has left your old life behind, put it to death; He silenced it at the cross. In Christ you already are a new creation!

And let's get even more practical; let's apply this power to how you actually can handle the hurt you've been handed by others. What do you do with all that pain? Once again, you can't do anything, but Jesus can. Instead of pondering payback all the time, God has made you now a reconciler. You can specialize in the other way. It doesn't even matter whether the other person wants to make peace. Pile the load on the shoulders of the Savior who died and rose again. Then wish the person who has hurt you, wish them well. In Christ, because of Christ, wish him well. Wish her well. Pray that their life can be better too. Ask God to free them from being so hurtful. Lift the people in your life before God's throne of justice and grace and ask Him to take them into His care.

This doesn't mean you take abuse or relinquish healthy boundaries. It simply means that you operate another way and you leave the ultimate issue to Jesus Himself. As a reconciler, you embody the new way opened to you in Jesus Christ.

That's what Lew Smedes meant when he said, "When you feel this kind of three-dimensional pain, you have a wound that can be healed only by forgiving the one who wounded you." And you can forgive, because God in Christ has already forgiven you too. That forgiveness frees you. God gives you another way, a good and healthy way, a gracious way, to handle real hurts.

I hope you think deeply today about this word "reconciliation." It's an incredible

word in the Scripture for all of us because it has eternal promises and temporal power. Think about it. The Bible says that God reconciles. He then lets His reconciliation live in you and flow through you. He relieves you of what you can't change and frees you from the slavery of sin and woundedness. The old is gone. It's really gone. The new has come. And I'm going to be bold here; it's the only thing that really, really works in this life.

Have you heard of Reality TV? I'm not a big fan. It's show after show of showing people at their worst, people confronting people with their weaknesses as if such confrontation alone will make a difference. You know the truth. It doesn't.

That's why it amazes me, year after year, as a pastor, when I see, not the reality of reality TV, not the rampantness of sin and destruction, not the bravado of humanity that says that the real fix to all of our problems is right around the corner. No, it's when I see this great miracle; the love, the forgiveness, the mercy, the humility of God's grace alive in God's people from every walk of life, from every station in life, amidst every kind of scenario in this life.

When I see Jesus Christ and His truth, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness alive in the lives of God's people as forgiven sinners, as reconciled reconcilers, mercied merciful friends and neighbors; I'm awed by what God can do in the lives of people who put their trust in Jesus Christ alone.

The love of Christ is the only thing that lasts. Being reconciled to God in Christ is the only thing that holds and that is what brings light into darkness, overcomes anger with truth and love; and brings hope right into the middle of despair.

Reconciliation to God changes everything.

This is the gift that God wants you to have today. In Christ, you've been given another way to live, live it now and forever. Amen.