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Proper 19 • Genesis 50:15–21 • September 14, 2014

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A lot has happened since Joseph's brothers left him for dead in the desert. The brothers have been reunited with Joseph, and now their father, Jacob, has died. It is as if they are back in the desert staring into the pit where they left Joseph dying. Joseph's brothers are face-to-face with the guilt of their murderous intent. Why? They are not in this state because of anything Joseph has said or done. In fact, Joseph has demonstrated his loving forgiveness and has taken his brothers into his care. The brothers are in this state because the guilt of their sin remains, and it has generated fear within them. Satan is at work causing them to fear the retributions of their brother.

Filled with fear before the power of Joseph to kill them, and in the absence of Jacob to protect them, they come face-to-face with the temporal consequences of their sins. Ultimately, they are moved to repentance before Joseph, and he grants them forgiveness. Yes, much has happened since Joseph's brothers left him for dead in the desert, but

only now has the sin been confessed and absolved. Despite their wickedness, Yahweh worked for the good of his people and provided for their needs. Then in this text, God enables Joseph to forgive his brothers even as Joseph has been forgiven of his own sin.

The devil has a way of using sin to keep us in fear and guilt. The devil does not want us to receive the full and free forgiveness that Christ offers us. He works diligently to make us doubt that the forgiveness is real. He creates the same fear within us that Joseph's brothers had. Satan wants us to believe that God is out to get us, to kill us, and to make us pay for what we have done. The devil wants us right where Joseph's brothers are in our text: filled with fear, not knowing where to turn, and scrambling to find protection in ourselves.

Our gracious and loving God does not look upon us in our sin in such a way. Rather, he looks upon the filth of our sin, desires its punishment and our salvation, and so sends Christ. He sends the Christ to be left for dead in the wilderness, to suffer the pains and torments of death, even death on a cross for us, and to be buried in a pit. From the pit of death and despair, God raises the same Christ from the dead. Despite the evil of our sin, he overcomes sin and grants us full and free salvation. He removes our fears and replaces them with life.

Far beyond the provision of Joseph for his brothers and their families, Christ provides for not only every bodily need, but for the eternal needs of our salvation. He feeds us with the bread of life, fills us with his word, and invites us not to fear. For in him is life; our life!

Suggested Outline

- I. The story of the text – From fear to forgiveness
- II. The story of us – From fear in sin to forgiveness in Christ
- III. Fear not – God has worked good out of evil