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

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particular focus, as does our call. Ezekiel’s call is to be a personal soul winner, one who reclaims sinners for true life in the society of God’s people, and that is our call as well, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

That is the force, also, of Jesus’s words in today’s gospel lesson from Matthew 18.

> Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me . . . If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. (vv. 5, 12–13)

Today as we are called to be personal soul winners, we are called to joy, the joy of sharing the message of Jesus’s death and resurrection with others. We sometimes forget that. We become all tied up in our own trials and tribulations, or we become so concerned about all the evil in this world today that we are almost led to despair. But then we remember the words of the psalmist in Psalm 32 and remember that our sins are forgiven and we are blessed.

Ezekiel’s name means, “God strengthens,” or “strengthened by God” and so are we all by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. In the chapter that follows our text for today Ezekiel points us to the Messiah as the true Shepherd who will deliver and feed his flock (34:11–31), in Jesus we know that that has happened and continues to happen yet today.

Baptized into Christ, called by his name, we pray for the grace to know and continue to share the promises of his kingdom. Regardless of what may happen we have one task—to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tm 4:2).

May God grant us the grace to do just that, Amen.

David Wollenburg

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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

Paul Philp

Proper 20 • Isaiah 55:6–9 • September 21, 2014

Better ways, better thoughts. The ways and thoughts of God are immeasurably better than the ways and thoughts of sinful people. God therefore calls all humanity to true repentance, that is, to abandon their own wicked thoughts and ways and to return to God in faith—for God’s ways include incomprehensible mercy toward sinners!

The iniquitous ways of Judah and Jerusalem have become a festering wound, and God’s devastating judgment is falling upon them (Is 1:4–7): the assaults of Assyria and eventually the exile imposed by Babylon. Yet under the dominant theme of comfort (40:1), Isaiah also proclaims hope through the obedient work of Yahweh’s Servant in chapters 42, 49, 50, and 53. This final Servant Song, in particular, serves as background for our pericope: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his