

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost/September 13, 2020
Genesis 50:15-21/The Place of God?
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?”

You know this person well. You heard about him in Sunday School. He’s so well known all I will have to do is mention one piece of clothing and you will know who I am talking about. This person, as a boy, wore a coat of many colors his father made for him. Now you know who he is, don’t you? His name is Joseph.

Ah, Joseph, the favorite son of his father. He would do anything his father told him to do. His father would send him to spy on his brothers. His brothers quickly came to resent him because of the favoritism his father showed. The situation was even worsened by the dreams Joseph began telling his brothers. These dreams always placed Joseph at the center of attention. As far as the brothers were concerned, little brother Joseph was getting far too much attention as it was. So, the brothers came to hate this favorite son. They hated him so much that they wanted him out of the way.

One day, when Joseph came out to the field where his brothers were, they grabbed him and threw him in a pit. They all wanted to kill him, except the oldest. He was fed up with Joseph too, but he felt responsible. So instead of killing his younger brother, he sold him to some merchants who were in the area. From that time on life went downhill for Joseph. He would never go home again.

Joseph went through many mis-fortune in Egypt. He was sold as a slave, and even after proving himself was given some responsibility as a sort of head-slave, false charges were brought and he was thrown into prison. Only years later did Joseph see how God still loved him

and was working things out for overall good. Only years later did he see God's hand working to bring good from evil his brothers did.

Joseph, you will remember, was made ruler over Egypt, second in command under Pharaoh himself. He was given responsibility for all the land of Egypt, to see to it the people were provided for in the upcoming famine. Joseph found himself in a position of great power all at once. Yes, the dreams came true! His brothers did bow down at his feet! This gave him a real advantage. He had several debts he could have settled. He could have sent an army after his brothers and had them all brought before him, and thrown in jail. He could have gotten revenge against Potiphar and his wife, the woman that got him into trouble and had him thrown into jail. You've felt like that about someone, haven't you? It's our natural reaction. When they do something bad to us, we want revenge. We want to hurt them like they hurt us. But Joseph was a man of God. He paid attention to what God desired. He did not use the power given him in a negative way to get revenge, for he had already forgiven those who had wronged him.

The setting of our text was after Jacob died. After their father was dead, Joseph's brothers were worried he would try to get even. But Joseph had no such plans. He had forgiven his brothers years before, and he meant what he said. He stated it to them in our text for today, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?" Joseph was telling them he had no right to stand in God's place and hold a grudge against them. He was telling them God had not given the right of retribution to him or anyone else on this earth.

This question Joseph asked his brothers is a key question that would be useful for us to talk about for a few minutes today. Ask this question of yourself: "Am I in the place of God?" Joseph clearly stated he was not in the place of God. God allows no one in His place when it comes to punishment. God makes that clear with [Rom

12:19]: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” So as far as taking revenge, or even being angry with anyone on this earth, God specifically tells us this is not for us to do. In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells Peter and the other disciples to forgive, and not just once, not just seven times, but seventy times seven; Jesus message here is: “Don’t stop forgiving. Ever!” God doesn’t allow us to take revenge. Not at all, even though we want to all the time.

Am I in the place of God? This question seems hardly worth talking about. God is perfect, we are far from it. God is holy, we are unholy. God is love, we often don’t love as we should. God is a spiritual being, present everywhere at once, knows everything, sees everything, hears all prayers. We are physical beings, present in only one place at a time, and we miss a lot of things we should see. We can only listen to one thing at a time, so we could not possibly hear all prayers. God is almighty, we are weak and limited. So, there is no contest. “Am I in the place of God?” Hardly! We could never hope to be.

The good news comes when we hear there is forgiveness for all those times when we unjustly put ourselves in the place of God. God went to a lot of trouble to accomplish that forgiveness for us. God won forgiveness for us by putting Himself in our place. Jesus Christ coming to this earth, living the perfect life and dying on the cross is God putting Himself in our place for all those times we sinfully try to put ourselves in the place of God. Because God put Himself in our place in the man Jesus Christ, He chooses not to see our sin any longer. He chooses to be forgiving instead of holding grudges. When we realize all of our failures, it is good news to hear of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, where God took the place of man, and know that because of that sacrifice God offers us forgiveness instead of insisting on punishment.

Now as His redeemed children, we receive a wonderful privilege in God gives us the honor of acting as His representatives. Peter says [1 Pet 2:9], “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” So, we honestly recognize our weaknesses and sinfulness, and answer “Am I in the place of God?” Definitely NOT! Yet we are. Yes, each of us, you, me, all people are called to be in the place of God. We are in the place of God in witness. By “witness” I’m talking about your behavior, living as one of God’s people.

We are in the place of God in being just as forgiving as Joseph. Not only has Jesus won the forgiveness of God for all of us, but He wants us to pass forgiveness on to others. Jesus wants us to be as ready to forgive others as God the Father is ready to forgive us. Jesus says: [Luke 6:36] “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” We are therefore commanded to stand in the place of God when it comes to forgiving our fellow man.

Joseph asked his brothers that day thousands of years ago, “Am I in the place of God” As far as holding a grudge, as far as punishment, staying mad, getting revenge, the answer is no. But in another sense, Joseph could ask the same question: “Am I in the place of God?” and the response would have to be YES! Joseph’s question is one we need to continually ask ourselves each day we live. Are we in the place of God? No, because we are not to judge, not to hold grudges, retain anger against our neighbor. But ask it again. Are we in the place of God? YES! Because we are forgiven, merciful, and compassionate to others just as God is to us. May God the Holy Spirit enable us to do this good work here in time; then to take us to the new heavens and new earth for all eternity.