

For seventeen years Joseph's brothers lived with guilt. Yet not because Joseph refused to forgive them. He did. He wept tears of joy over them way back when he revealed himself to them in Egypt. He was second in power there under Pharaoh, and he could have used his power to severely punish his brothers. Instead, he used it to provide for them and their families during the famine. In this way he showed them that he truly had forgiven them for what they did to him.

But sin is vicious. When it sinks its vile jaws into a person, that wound can remain for a long time, even for life. The infection it leaves behind can spread throughout the body. It must be thoroughly cleansed. And not just once. For that open wound is, from now on, a place in the body where infection can enter in.

The brothers of Joseph had sinned against him grievously. When he was much younger, they sold him to slave traders heading down to Egypt. They desired to ruin his life. They intended and carried out great evil against him. But in time their sin left a gaping wound in them. And wounds hurt. They can make it difficult for the body to function and to sleep at night. I know this to be true, for I have had such wounds. Haven't you?

Now this may seem backwards to us. We would think that the wound would be in the person who was wronged, not in the one who did the wrong. Yet look at Joseph. He was wronged more than any of us will ever be. And yes, it hurt him badly. But only for a while. He committed himself to the Lord, trusting also in Him. God healed his wound by granting Joseph to forgive his brothers.

This is how wounds are healed. This is how infection is removed. Through forgiveness. When forgiveness is sought and given, and brothers live in peace with each other, this is how God heals us of our brokenness.

Joseph had a clear conscience for he bore no grudge against his brothers. But his brother's consciences were not clear. They were festering wounds. Now that their father was dead, perhaps Joseph would take back his forgiveness. Perhaps they would get the punishment they so deserved.

Joseph wept when they told him these things. Wouldn't we also weep if we learned that someone was not assured that we had forgiven them? And then we would surely do what Joseph did. He reassured his brothers. "*Do not fear,*" he told them, and he cared for them.

Because we live together in society, at times we are Joseph, and at times we are his brothers. We are sinners living among sinners. And our sinfulness will show itself. It is not our desire as Christians to hurt each other. But it happens and will continue as long as we are on this side of heaven. Sometimes we are wronged by someone, and sometimes we are the one who does the wrong either with our words or with our actions.

When you and I are Joseph, someone hurts us sinning against us, sin is right there crouching at the door of our heart. It wants to overtake us and infect us with its deadly poison. Yes, deadly. For even though we are not the one who did the wrong, if we refuse to forgive, we should not think that God will forgive us.

“*Am I in the place of God?*” said Joseph to his brothers. The evil they meant for him God meant for good. Who was Joseph to interfere with God? God’s perfect plan was to use the wrongs committed against Joseph for His gracious purposes. And isn’t this true also with us? When someone sins against you, no matter how evil and hurtful, is not God intending to use that evil for good? Who are we to interfere with God’s merciful purposes? When we are wronged as was Joseph, may God heal our wound, as He did for Joseph, by granting that we forgive as he did.

But what about when we are the brothers of Joseph - when we sin against someone else? Joseph’s brothers were blessed to have him as their brother. He forgave them unconditionally. Someone else may well not have done so.

Sometimes that “someone else” is the person that you or I offend. Though we seek forgiveness, it is not given to us. Our sin against that person creates an open wound in us, and the infection it can cause is very serious. For when someone refuses to forgive us, either we can despair, or we can become angry at that person and think poorly of them. And like a poison coursing through our body, we are overtaken by sin.

There are people in my life who still have not forgiven me. Some of these people are now dead and buried, so I can no longer seek peace with them. Some of these people refuse to even tell me what the wrong is that I did to them. And I simply must live with this. And I’m quite sure that I am no different from you in all this. You want to live in peace with all. But with some this is not possible.

What is possible, so far as God depends, is for you to live in peace with Him. Every sin against our neighbor is at its core a sin against God. You and I have offended God, doing much worse to Him than the brothers did to Joseph. *We crucified the Lord of glory*, as the apostle says, by our rebellious actions. Are we sorry as were the brothers of Joseph? Do we fall down before God, as they did before Joseph, and repent of our sins against Him?

Repent we must, and repent we can by His grace, for our God deals with us as Joseph dealt with his brothers. In fact, this story God put here in the Bible for us to comfort us. The unconditional forgiveness Joseph gave his brothers is a beautiful portrait of God’s forgiveness for you.

God has forgiven you. Look at Jesus as He hangs on the cross. See His side. There is the open wound which you and I caused. Yet no infectious poison comes out, but only grace and forgiveness for you. The water and the blood which came from His side is here in the baptismal font for you, and here in the sacramental cup for you. No punishment for you, only mercy. Not for just some of you; for all of you. Baptism is for all sinners. And Jesus shed His blood on behalf of all.

Forgiveness was won on the cross for everyone, but it is not given there. It is given, for one, in the gracious cleansing flood of your baptism into Christ. You were baptized once, but every day through repentance you are returned to these merciful waters so that your sin is daily forgiven. God does not want you to live with guilt. And so like Joseph to his brothers, God delights in reassuring you: Yes, you dear sinner, you are truly forgiven. Amen.