

**Carrying Out the Church's Job**

*“Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?” Genesis 50:19.*

This weekend, Emmanuel's Education Kickoff weekend, is another victory worth celebrating as we continue our movement forward from the halting effects of the past six months. There's been a lot of work done by so many people to ensure that getting back to this point might be possible. And as we arrive at this point of kicking off our education season, we are also aware that getting to this point isn't the final goal. Our desire isn't merely to begin this education season at Emmanuel, but also to see it through to its completion with the help of God.

While there are many things that will continually have to be considered as each week passes by, the biggest thing for us to consider in this moment is educating or reeducating ourselves on our purpose here at Emmanuel. To start, I want your help. Take out your bulletins and flip over to the very back. Underneath the title, “Emmanuel Lutheran Church – Building faith in the city,” there are three paragraphs that I want us to read together as we start to remind ourselves who we are and why we exist. If you're watching online, you'll find these same words in the sermon handout.

Let's join together, “We are a caring family of baptized Christians bound together in the forgiveness which God has provided all people through His Son.

This family exists to announce this gift of forgiveness to individuals of all nations and cultures through the preaching of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Emmanuel instructs young and old according to the confessional standard of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and reaches out through forgiving relationships, working to connect all members of the family through caring friendships.

Emmanuel serves as shepherds of the sheep; seekers of the lost; friends of sinners; and caregivers to the poor, lonely and broken-hearted. It is a family that cares for all people and reaches out to witness to the love and forgiveness found in Jesus Christ.”

Thank you for participating. Now I know that there's too much in this statement for us to unpack right now, however I don't want us to miss two words that show up in all three paragraphs: *family* and *forgiveness*. At the core of who we are and why we exist is to be by God's grace and mercy a forgiving family. Hopefully, this isn't a surprise to any of us. In fact, last week Pastor Eggold masterfully reminded us that the church's job, our job, is forgiveness. In Christ Jesus, God has given us the power and authority to forgive!

This weekend, our Old Testament and Gospel readings build upon what was shared last week and provide depth to our core identity here at Emmanuel. These readings educate us as to how we carry out the church's job of forgiveness. These readings reveal to us how we are to faithfully wield the great power and authority of forgiveness that God has graciously given to us.

At the end of our Gospel reading, Jesus makes this point that forgiveness flows from the heart. Forgiveness, the job of the church, is a matter of the heart. Faithfully wielding the power and authority of forgiveness begins with the heart. To be clear, when Jesus links forgiveness and the heart, He isn't merely saying it's an emotional connection. While emotions are certainly part of forgiveness, the wicked servant from Jesus' parable makes it very clear that one can be deeply emotional and yet entirely unforgiving. So then, when Jesus links forgiveness and the heart, He has something different in mind ... a heart that understands its place.

The wicked servant in our Gospel reading isn't an example of a heart that understands its place. For us to better understand what Jesus has in mind, we need to turn to our Old Testament reading and learn from the example of Joseph. In this reading, we are shown what it truly looks like to forgive a brother from the heart. Again, while emotions are most definitely involved, Joseph's forgiveness isn't driven solely by emotions. If forgiveness was purely an emotional experience, Joseph of all people, had every reason not to forgive, having been abandoned and forsaken by his brothers into slavery. Yet, Joseph does forgive from the heart.

While there's little doubt that Joseph would have had great emotional baggage from the forced separation from his family, his heart clung not to the injuries it had sustained but to its humble place before God. Confronted by his brothers now that their father had passed, with them kneeling, pleading, and indenturing themselves to him, Joseph was faced with one difficult question, "Am I in the place of God?"

If his heart had answered yes, he could have gotten even and satisfied the sinful human lust for vengeance; but by God's grace, Joseph's heart answered no. **"Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"** (*Genesis 50:19*) Despite all that Joseph had endured, his heart had not grown calloused and cold. Even though the evil he had experienced could make any heart hard and closed off, the Lord renewed his heart to see beyond the wrongs he had experienced and realize the Lord's life-giving work.

Are you in the place of God? That's the question our hearts still face today as we carry out the job of the church: forgiveness. Sadly, Satan, the world, and our own sinful natures are so adept at taking God's gift of forgiveness as license and permission to play God. Consider all the family circles that we're a part of, here at church, maybe at home, perhaps at work, or even at school, during good times in one of these and probably all of these family circles, we've failed to forgive from the heart. Now in the times that we're experiencing right now, our hearts are very frail and our emotions very high, and so our answer to that question in either thought, word, or deed has increasingly become a resounding, "Yes, I am in the place of God."

Whether our answer to forgo mercy and heartfelt forgiveness to play God comes from fear, frustration, anger, weariness, sadness, etc., we all have found ourselves playing the part of that wicked servant from Jesus' parable throughout our lives and especially in these past six months. Like that wicked servant, we stand under a similar eternal sentence from God, "Wicked servants! I have forgiven you. Why can't you have mercy on those around you like I have had on you?"

Today, Jesus steps between us and God's rightful verdict of eternal imprisonment for us. Our wickedness is now His. Our unmerciful and unforgiving hearts are crucified with Him, and from His mercy Jesus cries out, "Father forgive them ...". And for Jesus' sake, once again our Father forgives our debts. Once again, we are freed from sin and death so that we might again learn to forgive from hearts that have been renewed by His death and resurrection. By the Holy Spirit's work through Word and Sacrament, we can and will have hearts that truly understand their place and can truly forgive from the heart.

So, we leave this day, not thinking that we need to become better Josephs, but understanding that because of what God has done for us in Jesus, He can and will turn our hearts to forgive in the same way Joseph did! We leave this day with hearts that understand their place before God; that trust His forgiveness and realize that what He calls us to forgive in each other pales in comparison to what God has forgiven us. With hearts renewed by God's mercy, our hearts aren't seeking to bind forgiveness to a certain quota, to the lifetime of the family member who holds the family together, or to our sinful lust to vengefully play God, but our new hearts seek to mercifully forgive with the abundance of God's mercy that has already been shown to us.

This Education Weekend isn't only about our tremendous gratefulness for our local schools' and Bible classes' educators. This weekend is about each and every one of us that God can and will use to educate the world around us on what it means to forgive from the heart. With that in mind, I encourage every one of us, in light of God's mercy, to later on this week reread those three paragraphs from earlier and thank God for the ways that He has mercifully brought you to this family and used you in this family in the past to carry out Emmanuel's purpose, and then also ask Him to open your eyes to future opportunities here at Emmanuel that He is leading you towards to connect, serve, care, and witness to the mercy and forgiveness He has shown you.

Maybe it's faithfully attending and participating in a new Bible class? Maybe it's caring for some of our educators in our local communities through word and action? Maybe it's taking on the responsibility to recognize newer members in your section of pews and helping them get connected to other things here at Emmanuel? Maybe it's getting up the gumption to invite that neighbor or friend to come visit? Like Joseph, the

Lord, can and will you use you, His forgiven children, to mercifully provide and care for those around you. May the Lord continually open our eyes and hearts to mercifully carry out the church's job of forgiveness. Amen.

**In Christ,**

**Pastor Dan**