

Sermon Title: **“I Cannot Forgive Yet, Lord!”**

Bible: **Genesis 45:3-11, 15 & Luke 6:27-38**

When: on the 7th Sunday after the Epiphany, February 23, 2025

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. I Cannot Forgive Yet, Lord!

After reading today’s Scripture Readings, my response is not “Yes, Lord, I will love my enemies” but “I cannot love my enemies, and I cannot forgive yet, Lord!” In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus taught us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, and to forgive. We love our families, our friends, and love even our neighbors. Then, can we love our enemies? Can we do good to those who hate us? I cannot love my enemies yet, and I cannot forgive yet, but sometimes, we can witness directly and indirectly amazing love and grace.

The story of Joseph in Genesis is one of those stories. This Joseph is not the one of Mary and Joseph. This Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob’s twelve sons. Joseph was their father’s favorite. This meant that ten older brothers were jealous of Joseph. Very sadly, this led them to sell Joseph as a slave to Egypt, when he was 17 years old. As a slave in Egypt, Joseph had a lot of struggles, and with God’s protection and guidance, he became the 2nd leader after Pharaoh, when he was 30 years old. There were seven years of plenty. During this plenty,

Joseph prepared for the coming seven years of famine, while saving and storing the leftovers. When the famine started, many people suffered from it, and they came to Egypt to ask for help, because with Joseph's leadership, Egypt was ready for the famine. In the 2nd year of famine, Joseph's family also came to Egypt, actually to Joseph, the 2nd in command, to ask for help. Joseph was 39 years old. It was 22 years after he had been sold into slavery by his brothers.

This is where today's scripture reading of Genesis began. If you were in Joseph's shoes, what would your response to the brothers be? If your siblings sold you as a slave, if your family acted like an enemy, if you went through a lot of struggles in a foreign land, if you had to face injustice and suffering, and if all of these started with your brothers' hate and mistreatment, what would your response be? If our family or our friends turn into enemies who hate us, curse us, and mistreat us, can we still love them? Can we bless them? Can we forgive them in advance? For about 22 years, what Joseph did was not to fuel his anger against his brothers, but to look for God's way, God's will, and God's love and grace. Even through the struggles and suffering, Joseph found God's plan, and most importantly, God's love and grace. So, he revealed himself to his brothers, not to avenge them, but to forgive and embrace them.

2. Our Repentance and Our Forgiveness

When do we forgive others, before receiving an apology or after receiving an apology? Can we say "No problem" even before we hear "I'm sorry"? What I mean is that forgiveness

comes after repentance, right? This logical order, repentance and then forgiveness, makes sense. Sometimes, repentance can come very late, especially when it is related to communal sins. For example, slavery and racism can be regarded as a communal sin. Definitely, many many people, our African American sisters and brothers, suffered from this unjust system. Then, who needed to say “I’m sorry” and to repent? Our denomination’s founder John Wesley published “Thoughts Upon Slavery” in 1774, and urged people to quit the slave trade. He became a support of the Society of Abolition of the Slave Trade when it was founded in 1787. But as our church has been a part of this community and society, we could not be free from this communal sin of slavery and racism. In the 18th and 19th centuries, because of racism, because we had not allowed our Black sisters and brothers to worship together in the same Sanctuary, many of them left our church and our denomination. There was sin which led to injustice and suffering.

In 2000, United Methodists held an “Acts of Repentance” Service at our General Conference, while confessing the sin of racism within our denomination, which had caused Blacks to leave our church. In the 2004 General Conference, United Methodists held a “Service of Appreciation” for African Americans who stayed in the church despite institutional racism. Our repentance might be late, but it is never too late, and I believe that God’s love, grace, and mercy are expressed through our Black sisters and brothers. And I am so proud of our denomination, and our church—this church. We celebrated Black History Month together last Sunday. If you missed it, please check out our service on YouTube.

3. God's Forgiveness and Grace!

Sometimes we do not want to confess our faults or our sins. Sometimes, our repentance can come later than it ought to. Many times, we forgive others only after they admit their faults. And I would like to share what God's forgiveness looks like. When we have communion, during the time of confession and pardon, we declare the good news, which is that "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven." Even before we confess our sins, God already forgave our sins, because of God's love. In our way, forgiveness comes after repentance, but in God's way, forgiveness comes first, before repentance.

In the story of Joseph, I believe that Joseph had already forgiven his brothers first, and revealed himself to them, not to punish them, but to help them. In the story of the prodigal son, the Father had already forgiven his son, and was waiting for him, regardless of his repentance. On the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," because Jesus was already forgiving them. When good parents discipline their children, I believe that good parents know their children's faults, and are already forgiving as they discipline the children. Discipline is not meant to punish but to help them to grow, because good parents love their children. God's forgiveness comes first and is already there, because God is love and God is graceful! Grace is the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God.

When Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and forgive them today, what is our response?

My response is “I cannot forgive yet, Lord, because my enemies do not repent.” And I know that it is not possible because of my love, but it is possible because of God’s love and grace. So, I listen to Jesus’ teaching to love my enemies, and I come to Jesus, because Jesus loves me unconditionally and gracefully. It is okay not to forgive others, and not to love our enemies. I do not believe that God punishes us. God knows that it is very difficult, and not easy. But please do not miss the amazing gift of love and grace towards you from our God. Then, we are able! We are able to love ourselves, others, and even our enemies.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, your teaching to love our enemies is very difficult for us to follow, because we want an easier way. But as you call us, we come to you. When we come to you, please embrace us with your grace, your love, and your mercy! Please guide us to love as you love us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.