**SERMON 1-19-2020**

**GENESIS 50:15-21**

There was an attorney, who was a faithful Christian.

After studying the Bible for some time, he decided to forgive, the debts

          of all his clients who had owed him money for more than six months.

He drafted a letter explaining his decision and its Biblical basis,

          and sent 17 debt-canceling letters by certified mail.

Sixteen of the seventeen letters were returned, unsigned and undelivered.

Apparently, the clients refused to sign for them and open the envelopes.

They were afraid the attorney was suing them for their debts.

So, in their fear, they ended up running away from his forgiveness and generosity.

It would be an incredible understatement to say Joseph and his brothers

          did not get along with each other.

They did not understand one another, and did not trust each other.

Joseph was alienated by from his brothers, sold into Egyptian slavery,

          imprisoned for a crime he did not commit,

          and ignored by the forgetful cupbearer,

          Joseph's faith must have been sorely tested.

A famine forced Joseph's brothers to travel to Egypt looking for food.

Kneeling before Joseph, but not recognizing him,

          they begged for the right to buy food.

Joseph could have taken revenge.

He could have put them death.

Joseph didn't try to deny, cover up, or even minimize the actions of his brothers.

He told them quite bluntly their actions were meant for his harm.

He did not gloss over the injustices which had been done to him.

He faced up to it.

He wanted to be reconciled with his brothers, but it was not easy.

Forgiveness is not easy.

Receiving forgiveness is not always easy either.

Joseph told his brothers he had forgiven them.

The problem was they couldn't believe it.

Until they accepted Joseph's offer of forgiveness…

… they would still live a life of doubt

… they would still live in fear of judgment

… they would still be separated from their brother who loved them.

Joseph's brothers were fearful he might still take revenge on them.

As long as their father Jacob was alive, the brothers did not worry that Joseph

          would repay them for what they did to Him.

But after Jacob died, all that changed.

They sent messengers to Joseph begging forgiveness.

"Am I in the place of God?" Joseph asks.

Joseph knew it was not his place to judge, but to forgive.

He had already forgiven them, many years earlier.

But they still had trouble believing it.

Many considered President Ronald Reagan one of their heroes.

His forgiveness of his enemies was one of the many things which made him great.

Ronald Reagan's attitude after the 1982 assassination attempt on his life

          made an impression on his daughter, Patti Davis.

As she watched the faithful example of President Reagan, she later declared:

          "The following day after the assassination attempt,

          my father said he knew his physical healing was directly dependent

          on his ability to forgive his attacker, John Hinckley.

          By showing me that forgiveness is the key to everything,

          including physical health and healing,

          he gave me an example of Christ-like thinking, which I will never forget."

But forgiveness is not easy.

One of the most difficult things we will ever do, is to forgive someone who has

          stolen from us, lied about us, hurt us, or broken a promise to us.

Forgiveness is not natural.

The normal, human response is revenge. We always want to get even.

Forgiveness is not denial. We can't simply sweep hurtful things under the rug.

Someone hurt us. Someone wronged us. We have to deal with that.

Forgiveness is not a one-time event.

Forgiveness is an active verb.

Every day we have to give up the anger and resentment

          in our hearts and in our minds.

It doesn't normally happen overnight.

Forgiveness is not approval.

Just because we forgive someone,

          it does not erase the wrong they have committed.

Forgiveness does not necessarily resume a relationship.

Good relationships are built on trust.

If someone has hurt us and broken that trust,

          we can forgive them,

          but we may not necessarily be able to resume the relationship.

God tells us to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,

          as He has forgiven us.

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love.”

God does not want us to be imprisoned by the shadows of yesterday,

          but to be free for today, and to walk in the hope of tomorrow.

When we hold on to grudges, it affects our present, and our future.

When we get caught up in grudges it affects our faith.

We can hold on to, carry around, and stumble over grudges,

          or we can let them go.

It is our choice.

Forgiveness doesn't make the other person right, it makes us free.

We cannot go around grief, or anger, or resentment.

We cannot avoid it or ignore it.

We must go through it in order to grow and to heal.

A member of a major non-Christian religion

          was talking with a Christian missionary in India.

He asked the missionary: "Can you tell me one thing your religion

          can offer the people of India which mine can't?"

The missionary thought for a moment and replied, "Forgiveness!

          Forgiveness makes all the difference in our lives!"

Through the constant and never ending practice of forgiveness

          we find peace, and healing, and joy.

Have you ever wondered how God could forgive us?

He forgives us because He loves us.

He has always loved you.

And because He loves you, he is able to forgive you,

          no matter what you have done.

He wants us to forgive others because it makes such a difference in our lives.

“Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

Just before Sunday School the teachers were talking with one another

          about how mean and hurtful people could be to each other.

One little girl overheard what the teachers were saying.

She went over to her teacher and said:

          "My sister is always mean to me, but I love her anyway.

          She's my sister."

God told us to love one another.

Without love, there can be no forgiveness.

AMEN