

Different
Week 6 – Repair not Repay
October 28, 2018
Linda Marr, Director of Discipleship

Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Linda Marr and I'm Director of Discipleship here at Woodside and a member of the Sermon Writing Team.

Before I head into our message today, let's take a moment to pause and remember the 11 victims of the horrific act of hate and violence during the Shabbat services at The Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Will you join me in a word of prayer? Father God we come before you today – our hearts broken once again by senseless violence and tragedy. We ask you to be with our country and our world – help us to move past evil and anger and hate and reconcile ourselves to each other and to you.

Forgive HER. Are you KIDDING me? After what she did to me? She's DEAD to me now. Why should I have to say I'm sorry – I did nothing wrong. You know it was all his fault. It will be a cold day in Yardley... before I apologize. I'll make them pay. They will regret the day they got in MY face. I'm just done. I've tried. Clearly, they don't want to meet me half way. The friendship is just not worth saving.

Every feel that way? People are human and yes, they will let us down and make us mad. And the world tells us we should not take that! Stand your ground. Don't show any weakness by apologizing. Hey you know what the bible says – an eye for an eye! Give them what's coming to them.

Let me set some boundaries here right off – we are not talking about abusive situations or anything that makes you feel unsafe. We're talking about disagreements that get out of hand. Arguments. Maybe past hurts or situations.

Often that anger festers inside of us. Have you ever gone to bed angry and instead of sleeping, you toss and turn, turning over and over that absolutely unfair situation? How you were wronged; how you deserve an apology. Plotting ways to get back at the person....

Revenge. Revenge is nothing new. In Genesis 26 we find the story of two very different twin brothers – Esau and Jacob, born to Abraham's son Isaac and his wife Rebekah.

Even in the womb these two brothers struggled; Rebekah could feel them wrestling in her belly. Esau came out first, with Jacob clinging to his heel – not letting him get away. As technically the first-born son, Esau had the birthright, the double portion of their father Isaac's inheritance as well as his expected eventual blessing. The

birthright gave Isaac his father's fortune; the blessing, continued prosperity, safety and success.

Esau might have been the elder, but Jacob was his mother's favorite. Before they were born, God revealed to Rebekah in a dream that "the older will serve the younger." Before they were even born, God had plans for these two sons of Isaac.

Years later when old and weak eyed Isaac decided it was time to give his blessing to Esau, Rebekah concocted a plan. She helped Jacob masquerade as his brother Esau, tricking Isaac and thereby receiving the blessing designated for Esau.

Esau was FURIOUS with his brother. Jacob stole what was rightfully his...or was it? Several years earlier Esau had come in from the fields voraciously hungry, eyeing Jacob's tasty stew. Without thinking twice, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a cup of soup. But none of that mattered now to Esau - he was MAD – he wanted that blessing and all the good fortune that would surely come with it. Esau was determined to REPAY his brother for wronging him and vowed that when his father passed, he would kill his brother Jacob. Revenge.

So, Rebekah who had craftily secured the blessing for Jacob, was now forced to protect her favorite son by sending him off to the land of her brother Laban in Mesopotamia. Rebekah never saw Jacob again. Rebekah won the blessing for Jacob but would die while he was still away.

On his way to Mesopotamia, Jacob stopped to rest. That night he dreamt of angels and heard the voice of God promising him the same things God had promised Abraham and Isaac – that he would be with Jacob and all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him and his offspring.

Not quite content with this promise from God, Jacob made a vow that sounded a bit like a wager, "If God will be with me and watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God...and all that you give me I will give you a tenth." Genesis 28:20-22.

And Jacob thrived in the land of Laban, staying there for 20 years and accumulating great wealth and possessions, several wives and many children. – eventually becoming so successful that Laban and his sons became jealous of him and God told it with time to go home.

Home - back to the land of Esau and his murderous vow. Jacob sent word that he was on his way and was told that Esau was coming out to meet him with "400 of his nearest and dearest men." Now Jacob was petrified. And like he had done all his life, Jacob took matters into his own hands and came up with a plan –to divide his family and livestock into two separate groups so that if Esau attacked, one group might have a chance to escape.

But this time Jacob also did something DIFFERENT. He took time to pray, saying, “I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’” Genesis 32:11.

And still Jacob couldn't fully let go of his old ways and hatched a plan sending lavish gifts of livestock ahead to pacify, aka bribe his brother. When night came, Jacob sent his family ahead and stayed behind by himself. As he lay down to sleep, Jacob encountered a mysterious stranger and Jacob wrestled with him all night long until the stranger touched the socket of Jacob's hip, wrenching it out of joint.

Still Jacob wouldn't let go until the man blessed him. Then the stranger gave Jacob the new name of Israel – which means “he struggles with God” and blessed him. Jacob the “heel catcher or supplanter” became Israel “he struggles with God and prevails.” Genesis 32:32.

As soon as the wrestling match ended, Esau and his mighty men came into sight. With the newfound humility and confidence of a man humbled and blessed by God, Jacob approached his brother and bowed seven times, demonstrating complete submission. As he looked up, he saw an amazing sight. His brother who had vowed vengeance and murder, threw his arms around his neck, embraced him and kissed him. And the brothers wept. Jacob was delivered from the fear of his brother and they each were freed from the hatred that had controlled them for so many years.

Great story, right? Deceiving Jacob. Murderous Esau. Brothers again. But how does this apply to our lives? How do we learn to repair our relationships? We can act DIFFERENTLY by turning to the WORD not the world.

To start off, we need to remember we truly can't do it on our own. Total forgiveness is HARD. But God shows us the way. **Step 1 -Reconciliation begins with God.** As we read in 1 John 4:10 “This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins...Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

God is the first forgiver – he offers us grace even before we ask for it. God leads the way by forgiving all our sin - Over and over. Really puts our hurts and arguments into perspective, right? If God can forgive my sin over and over, who am I to hold onto other's transgressions?

Reconciliation also has to become before reconciliation with God. Huh? Remember what Jesus teaches us in Mathew 5:23-24 – I like the way the Message translation captures this teaching - “If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon

your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then come back and work things out with God.”

If we want to live in harmony with our heavenly father, we need to be living in harmony with our human brothers and sisters. It’s as simple as that. And as hard as that. God thinks reconciliation is so important, he puts it before our communing with Him.

Reconciliation must also be intentional. Jacob knew he was wrong. He knew he had to make it right. And he had to take the first step. He was also fearing for his life, so that there was a great motivator. Bowing in submission to his brother paved the way for restoration.

Restoring a cracked relationship is like mending a broken arm. That arm won’t heal unless you go to a doctor and get it set. Broken relationships won’t heal on their own either. We can try to deny the pain or push it away. We can believe the platitude, “Time heals all wounds,” but we all know it only moves the pain below the surface, where it will eventually rear its ugly head and affect future relationships.

How do we take that first step? What do we say? In math we learn that “the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.” Same principle holds true here. A straight line like “I was wrong,” or “I haven’t been honest with you” or “What you did really hurt me,” or “I love you too much to give up on us.” Don’t beat around the bush; don’t blame. Clarify not confront. Try to keep accusations and revenge out of your words.

Reconciliation must also be bathed in intentional prayer. Prayer is the salve for wounded parties; it can ease the friction in relationships. Prayer changes things! Why do we act like Jacob and try to come up with a plan to solve things on our own? We need God to soften hearts, to ease emotions, to provide the right words, to bring understanding. And a good reminder— Jesus not only works in the lives of those being prayed for, he can change and soften the hearts of those who pray.

Reconciliation demands humility. God wrestled all night with Jacob so his heart would be in the right place when he met Esau. He wrenched the socket of his hip – forever humbling Jacob. Jacob then bowed seven times as he approached his brother. That act is a posture of humility. That act acknowledged that he had done the wrong. He was at fault. That first step was intentional and also bathed in humility. James 4:6 says “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” And I don’t know about you, but boy do I need and am ever so grateful for that grace each and every day.

Forgiveness completes reconciliation. Forgiveness is an action – it involves letting go so you can get on with the rest of your life. It is not probation but a pardon. It means no continuing resentment or bitterness. Forgiveness is HARD. We may think we can NEVER forgive. Those cutting words never be unheard. We need to turn to the God who forgives all our sins for help forgiving others. “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgives you. Ephesians 4:32.

Forgiving can be one of the hardest things that God requires of us. But the good news is He doesn't command it of us and leave us to do it on our own. He gives us Jesus as an example. And, He gives us the power, through the Holy Spirit. And, then, in the physical act of forgiveness we find emotional and spiritual peace.

Her name is Corrie. And this is her story.

It was after the end of World War II and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. "When we confess our sins, I said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever." The solemn faces stared back at me, not daring to believe. And that's when I saw him, a balding heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown hat clutched in his hands. One moment I saw the overcoat and brown hat, the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush, the huge room with its overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking past this man naked. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were.

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; I now realized this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck, a concentration camp where we were sent. Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea." And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me of course. But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze. "I was a guard at Ravensbruck," he began, but since then I have become a Christian. I know God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips. Fraulein – will you forgive me?"

And I stood there – I whose sins had every day to be forgiven – and could not. Betsie had died in that place – could he erase that slow terrible death simply by asking? It could not have been many seconds he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had to do. For I had to do it – I knew that. Jesus says, "If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I knew that not only as a command of God, but as a daily experience. I had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. These who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and horrible as that. And still I stood there with coldness clutching my heart.

But forgiveness is not an emotion – I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus help me!" I

prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so woodenly, mechanically I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you brother!" I cried. "With all my heart." For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

When Jacob reconciled with Esau, he said "For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably." Genesis 33:10. Who do you need to see the face of God in? Who is God nudging you to reconcile with?

Reconciliation can do that – God can do that. The face of your enemy can become the face of love and peace – the face of God by the grace of God.