

Less than a year ago, in a courtroom in Texas, after the jury was long gone and most of the spectators had left, Brandt Jean sat in the witness stand before the woman who had just been convicted of murdering his brother Botham.

What would you say to the woman if you were in Brandt's position? Little did Brandt know that the cameras were still rolling, so we know what he *did* say. To summarize he said: 'I forgive you. God forgives you. The best thing for you is to entrust your life to Christ.' He then went on to hug his brother's murderer. The judge, normally known for being strict, stepped down from the bench, hugged her also, and gave the woman a Bible.

It's easy to forget dramatic acts of forgiveness like this in our current climate where people are angry, upset, and unrelenting. Brandt Jean was only 18 years old when he publicly forgave his brother's murderer. That's the age of a college freshman. How could Brandt do such a thing? He, like us, knows that **OUR HEAVENLY FATHER'S FLAGRANT FORGIVENESS IN CHRIST JESUS MEANS THERE'S PLENTY TO GO AROUND.**

How can Christians forgive? I. Christians realize their place before a perfect God. We have a similar situation in the Old Testament. Joseph's brothers mistreated him: picked on him, hated him, and left him for dead in a well in the wilderness. Joseph was rescued and rose the ranks to one of the highest officials in Egypt. Due to a series of events, the brothers were reunited with Joseph. But they were concerned.

**“They said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.”**” Who wouldn't think that? The tables have turned and the brothers were at the mercy of Joseph. How many of us if we know we've wronged someone, fear that they'll get back at us? Even if they say it's okay and not to worry about it, don't our consciences put us on alert waiting for revenge to spring out like a jack in the box?

A guilty conscience is hard thing to shake. Sinners, like Joseph's brothers, fear that God is angry at them. This was Luther's problem. He struggled on how to find God's favor and love. He knew how much of a sinner he was. He was acutely sensitive of what God's demands were and how he could not meet them.

Think about how nerve-wrecking it would be to be accused of a crime and then face your accuser in court: to see the anguish on a victim's face, to witness their anger, or to see the tears in their eyes. The author of the book of Hebrews remarks: **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** How much more intimidating it would be to stand before our Heavenly Father who knows all our sins, offenses, and crimes?

There's no such thing as a victimless crime or a harmless sin. Even those things we do behind closed doors the Lord knows and despises. The Lord condemns sins of thought, word, and deed.

We may not have murdered, but we have lashed out against others with unkind words and evil thoughts. We may not have committed the act of adultery, but we have looked on lustfully at those to whom we are not married. We may not have stolen, but we dreamt about how much nicer it would be if we owned the toy instead of our friend. All of these make it on our rap sheet when we face God in cosmic courtroom.

To be a Christian means to know where you stand before God by your own actions. A Christian is aware of God's wrath, just as Joseph's brothers feared his revenge. A Christian knows he or she is a sinner in need of a savior. To be a Christian means to fully understand and appreciate the debt that you owe to God. Our Gospel says the debtor owed ten thousand talents which in today's money might as well be a bajillion dollars. Our debt to God is great.

Yet II. Christians receive our Heavenly Father's flagrant forgiveness. The brothers begged Joseph for forgiveness, they even fell down at his knees and said, "**We are your servants.**" Likewise, the servant in the parable begs the master for mercy, promising he will pay back the debt. In both cases, the brothers and the servant are forgiven.

This is a flagrant forgiveness, an outrageous grace shown to the offenders. Often we want to make reprimands and pay back those we've offended. That's how our justice system works. We talk about "paying the time" if someone gets sent to prison. It's a kind of paying back to those that you've harmed.

But this flagrant forgiveness that God shows us through His Son Jesus requires no payback. For humanity, it is a completely free gift. For God, it cost the life of His perfect, loving Son Jesus Christ. Faith believes and trusts that Christ has reconciled us to the Father. Simply believe and so it is done for you.

All of your sins—the sins that haunt your conscience and the ones you don't even know about—have been heaped on the back of Jesus Christ as He carried them up Calvary. The sins of the person you just can't stand have been forgiven by Christ. Even the sins of convicted murderers have been paid for through Jesus' precious blood and death.

Just like Joseph from our Old Testament lesson, Jesus was left for dead: abandoned, betrayed, and disowned by His disciples. If anyone had reason to say, "**It may be that [Jesus] will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.**" It would be the disciples. Yet Jesus rose again on the third day and went through locked doors to forgive them personally of the wrongs they committed against Him.

The words of Brandt Jean are the words Jesus tells you this morning: 'I forgive you. God has forgiven you. The best thing for you is to entrust your life to Me.' In Christ Jesus, God is no longer mad at you. You have a clean conscience.

And III. This flagrant forgiveness means there's plenty to go around. We forgive others because we know how much God has forgiven us in His Son Jesus Christ. We realize our place before our Heavenly Father, that is, as poor miserable sinners in need of forgiveness. At the same time, we believe and confess that Christ has died to forgive us and to make us holy, innocent, and righteous in God's sight. Knowing how much has been forgiven us, we can gladly forgive others.

Joseph also knew his place. He said, **“Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?”** He knew that he was a sinner in need of forgiveness, in that position, he could gladly forgive and reconcile to his brothers.

Commenting on what his son said in court, father Bertrum Jean said he too forgives his other son's murderer. Quote, “That's what Christ would want us to do. ... If you will not forgive, neither will your Father forgive you. I don't want to see her rot in hell. I don't want to see her rot in prison. I hope this will help her to change and recognize the damage, the hurt that our family's going through. So I wish her well and I will pray for her family and pray for her as well.” Bertrum paraphrases a verse from our Gospel text today. The Jean family certainly demonstrates the love of Christ in their forgiving of the one who hurt them so badly.

We certainly believe that God's forgiveness is perfect in Christ Jesus. As far as the East is from the West, declares the Lord, so far have I removed your transgressions from you.

Yet when it comes to our forgiveness, it is imperfect. Forgiveness doesn't mean you forget any wrong happened. If someone never paid you back the money they owed you, it might mean not loaning money to them again. If someone physically harmed you, that might mean never being alone with them where they could do the same.

Forgiveness means not defining someone by the wrong committed. Instead of viewing someone as a murderer, a liar, or a thief, we view them how God views them: someone for whom Jesus Christ died. Allison Jean, Brandt's mother commented, “forgiveness is for the forgiver and it doesn't matter what the forgiven does with it.” Whether they are repentant or not, our healing comes from acknowledging the pain that has been caused to us and entrusting it to Christ. Just as there's room for your enemies' sins at the cross, there's room for your hurts, pains and sorrows at the cross. Forgiving others means unloading our burdens onto Christ.

This is an education Sunday unlike any other here at Faith. You were probably wondering how I was going to shoehorn a mention of education Sunday into today's sermon. Education Sunday kicks off our Sunday school year for our young ones, and it is also an invitation to our adults to get involved with a Bible study if they haven't already.

Yet everything I mentioned up to this point relates to Education Sunday. The reason why we exist is to give you the confidence that through Jesus Christ, you have forgiveness, life, and a restored relationship with God. You have a place in Heaven. You have eternal life. And guess what, you no longer need to hold a grudge against those who have wronged you. There's plenty of forgiveness to go around.

Christian Education isn't about winning a Bible trivia bowl. Christian education is about filling you up with Bible stories and Bible verses so that you have ammunition to fight against the devil on the day of evil.

There may not come a day when you're put in such a tough position as Brandt Jean to forgive someone of a heinous crime. But there will be a day when you're called to forgive someone who has wronged you.

As your pastor, it is my prayer that on the day, you won't need to think about it. You will see the cloud of witnesses all around you. Joseph who forgave his brothers. Nathan who confronted King David and pronounced God's forgiveness. Zacchaeus who was transformed by the love of Jesus to return fourfold what he stole. And of course, Jesus who has forgiven you all your sins. The Holy Spirit uses these stories from Scripture to breathe life into you so that you too can gladly and willingly forgive and be kind to those who wrong you. On this Education Sunday may we drink deeply from God's lovingkindness shown to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.