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It's a classic story. It's one that all of us love. There's all different versions, but it's the same every time. Maybe it's "The Count of Monte Cristo" or "Django Unchained," maybe "The Wrath of Khan," or "Hamlet," perhaps "RoboCop" or "V for Vendetta." Either way, the story is instinctive to us: revenge. Some horrible people seek to destroy a good and undeserving person. They think the good guy is gone forever. But he bides his time. Then, after years go by, the hero reappears with almost divine power or wisdom and he brings on those horrible people exactly what they deserve.

We love revenge stories. It's because God put his law into our hearts. Deep down, all of us know that there is such a thing as right and wrong and we long to see people get what they deserve. There's just something right about those revenge stories.

However, there's something wrong with those stories too. In the Scriptures, God reveals something to us that is not natural: forgiveness. Today, God shows us that it is a sinful dream to pretend that *we* should be the ones to deal out that justice. That's God's role, not ours. Instead, our God wants us to treat others the way he has treated us. God wants us to forgive as we have been forgiven. Today, our God calls us to forgive other people for the wrongs they do to us, because we know that God Turns Their Evil into Good.

Joseph's life would almost make the perfect revenge story. We meet Joseph, a young and blessed man. Then we meet his horrible, jealous brothers. They can't stand Joseph's blessings so they sell their own brother into slavery. Joseph ends up rotting away in a dungeon all because of his brothers' dastardly plot. In any other revenge story, it would only be Joseph's thirst for vengeance that sustains him through those years.

Finally, the tables turn. Joseph not only escapes prison but he becomes the second most powerful man in all of Egypt! God gives Joseph wisdom and power so that he can not only rule but even save countless lives as he stores enough food to feed Egypt and all the surrounding countries during a devastating famine.

And then, as people are coming to buy food from Egypt, Joseph's chance for revenge comes. Those evil brothers of his also come to get food from Joseph. And what does Joseph do? He gives his brothers food for free. He invites all their families to come and live with him in Egypt. He makes sure that their needs are all taken care of. Not really the story that Hollywood is looking for, is it?

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But Joseph's life is not a revenge story. Instead, it's reality. It's history, through which God teaches us valuable lessons. Joseph understood that it was not his place to get revenge. Justice is God's thing. Joseph's role and ours is forgiveness.

Joseph's brothers, however, were still expecting revenge. They could see the story all too clearly. Just as deep down they loved to see other people get what they deserved, they knew that they deserved evil from Joseph.

So, when their father died, they knew there would be nothing to stop Joseph from getting back at them. He was the second most powerful man in all of Egypt! He could loose his vengeance not only on them but on all the members of their families! What plans for justice had Joseph thought up in those many, many years since they sold him? The brothers' imaginations could only guess at what was coming to them. They knew what they deserved, but they didn't know when it would come.

Do you ever feel that way? Ultimately, all of us have wronged God. Every sin we have ever done, whether thought, word, or action, all of them are wrongs committed against God. Do we fear that God will get even with us for our sins? Yeah, we know we are forgiven through Christ, but do we still think God is going to somehow make us pay? When bad things happen, do we say, "Well, that's just what I deserve"?

Those thoughts really show how weak our faith is. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for every one of our sins. God expects nothing from us because he received payment in full from Jesus' death on the cross. There is nothing more we have to suffer because of our sins. There is no more penance that God requires. We are totally forgiven and God considers us to have lived our lives perfectly in his sight. It's hard to believe, isn't it? But that's why God gives us his Word and baptism and the Lord's Supper, to assure us that it is true. We are forgiven!

Now, there certainly are consequences for sins. If I get myself into an addiction and repent of that, there will be consequences. I'll probably fail many times on the road to recovery, because of the chemical reactions that addictions have on the human brain. But that doesn't mean God hasn't forgiven me. If I murder someone and repent, I will still have to pay the legal consequences for that sin. The government may throw me in prison or even execute me for what I've done. But God has totally forgiven me in Christ.

There are no eternal consequences for our sins because Jesus already received those when he died on the cross. There are no consequences in our relationship with God because God brought his full wrath for our sins down on Jesus. God isn't looking to bring some horrible suffering into your life to make you pay for what

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you've done because Jesus already received the spiritual and eternal consequences that your sins deserved.

As Christians, we can learn to accept those earthly consequences because we know that God has taken care of the spiritual and eternal consequences. We know that through Christ, we are right with God. We know that because of Christ, God is preparing eternal glories in heaven for us to enjoy. We know by Christ that God has even promised to work all things for our good. God will even use those earthly consequences for our good.

If our God has so forgiven us, how can we refuse to forgive someone else, whatever it is they did. If we have nothing to fear from our God, against whom every one of our sins ought to be an unforgivable crime; if God has forgiven us all those, how can we refuse to forgive someone else.

Let's talk a little bit about what forgiveness looks like. Like love, God doesn't talk about forgiveness as merely a feeling. Forgiveness isn't something that I just need to feel strongly enough. Forgiveness needs to be shown in my actions. God doesn't just sit in heaven and feel good about us. He shows us that he has forgiven us by graciously taking care of our daily needs. He showed that forgiveness by sending Jesus to save us. He assures us that we are forgiven through the Word: every time we hear the gospel message, every time we remember our baptisms, every time we receive Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

In the same way, our forgiveness needs to be something we do. The person I have forgiven needs to understand by my actions that I have forgiven them. Joseph showed his brothers that he had forgiven them. He told them and showed them by caring for their needs and the needs of their families.

This kind of forgiveness doesn't come naturally to us. It's not even really possible for sinful people like you and me to live that way. But this is why God gives us his Word. Through the gospel, as we are in contact with the Word and with the Sacrament, God transforms our hearts to be like him.

In the Scriptures, God shows us the life of Joseph to teach us. Think about it. God used Joseph's slavery, that horrible crime his brothers committed, to make Joseph second in command of Egypt, so that Joseph could save all those lives. What Joseph's brothers did was horrible, but God used it to put Joseph into the perfect place so that he could save all those people!

In fact, Joseph was even able to save the lives of his brothers, and one of them was the ancestor of Jesus, the Savior of the entire world! If Joseph's brothers had died to that famine, God's promise of a Savior couldn't be fulfilled! God used Joseph's slavery to bring us salvation! God brought you and me salvation from

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Joseph's slavery and from his mercy.

I don't know what wrongs you've gone through. I don't know everything other people have put you through. God worked the evil in Joseph's life for good, and he will do the same in your life.

Maybe the deception someone played on you will make you wiser to avoid an even worse lie later in life. Maybe the money stolen from you will protect you from falling into a sin of greed. Maybe the pain someone put you through will give you the ability to help someone else going through a similar pain. Maybe we'll never see the good that God will work from your suffering, but God has promised, so we can be confident that God will keep that promise.

Like Joseph, God teaches us to forgive those who have wronged us, because ultimately, however we have been wronged, God will work it for our good. No one can harm God's people in a way that God cannot heal. No one can hurt God's people in a way that God cannot shape for our eternal welfare.

Joseph's life could have been quite the revenge story, but instead it was far better. It was a story of God's wisdom. It was a story of forgiveness.

When you are wronged, remember the wrongs you commit against God every day and how he has forgiven you. In Word and Sacrament, God shows you that he has graciously forgiven you for all of your sins so that you never need to fear him.

When you are wronged, remember how God worked the wrongs in Joseph's life for his good and even for our good. In the Word, he has promised you that he will work all things for your good too. When you are wronged, forgive because God Turns Their Evil Into Good. Amen.