

Lenten Small Group Study 2021

grounded in the living word chapter 06 conflicted forgiveness

read

Genesis 33.1-17

note: prior to meeting, you may wish to review the Esau/Jacob story in Genesis 25.19-34, and chapters 27-32

share

After sharing stories of pain, grief, and lament last week, this week let us consider what it means to forgive. Hopkins and Koppel note that we may be asked to forgive others, ourselves, even God. Forgiveness may come easily, it may be difficult. (Hopkins and Koppel 176)

Given what has transpired between Jacob and Esau, this latest encounter between the two brothers may prove surprising. We know what has happened to Jacob since he betrayed his brother, but we are not told what Esau has experienced in the intervening years. Against the backdrop of their reunion, some questions to ponder:

- What do you think forgiveness is not?
 - What do you think forgiveness is?
 - What are some assumptions we hold about forgiveness as Christians?
 - Does forgiveness always lead to reconciliation? Why or why not?
 - What do these two men teach us about forgiveness and reconciliation?
- (Hopkins and Koppel 177-179)

The reconciliation between the estranged brothers is truly of God. Hopkins and Koppel describe how forgiveness sometimes leads to reconciliation, when they say: “Forgiveness can be viewed as a relational process that requires *an awareness and a reckoning* on both sides: an awareness of being hurt or hurting others, as well as a reckoning experienced within confrontation with self, others, and God in order to move on.” (Hopkins and Koppel 179)

They go on to say, “Forgiveness is not simply human work. It requires God to ‘take up the slack’ of the distance separating us from others. In this sense, forgiveness is a gift from God.” (Hopkins and Koppel 182) Still, Hopkins and Koppel note that, “God may well take up the slack, but we still have our own work to do.” (Hopkins and Koppel 182)

Some questions to ponder:

- Why does God call us to forgive and reconcile? What happens when we refuse?
- What are some practical steps to help us forgive others, or to be forgiven by others?
- What prevents us from forgiving? What interrupts our reconciling? How has this been true in our congregation?
- What role does repentance (from the Hebrew *shuh*, to turn around) have in forgiving?
- How may putting ourselves in the place of another facilitate reconciliation?
- In what ways has God helped you to forgive? To repent? To reconcile?
- What transformation may result in the wake of forgiving and reconciling, whether individually or corporately? Is it permanent?
- What do we learn about God through the gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation?

And some questions to ponder alone:

- Who do you need to forgive today?
- What would you like forgiven in your life?

meditate

Jesus came to dwell among us, to teach among us, to heal among us, to die among us, all so we might be forgiven, fully, and reconciled with God and one another, forever. Jesus shows us why we are to forgive, and how we are to reconcile. When we struggle, we need only turn to Jesus to ask for his help. Let us invite Jesus into our fractured relationships so we might be made whole once more.

pray

God of All People, you meet us in the gaps. Standing in these strange places, we often bristle, stiffen, turn away, typecast, and judge with closed hearts and minds. Stir us with compassion to pry open the hallowed doors of closed consciousness to experience your goodness living through all. When we meet walls of resistance, help us to know conflict's source: fear of retribution, bruises inflicted by others, or harm done to ourselves. Embrace us with your fierce tenderness as first invitation to forgive and to release, however possible, leaning toward a future of reconciliation. Amen. (Hopkins and Koppel 197)

based upon and adapted from *Grounded in the Living Word: The Old Testament and Pastoral Care Practices* by Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010)