

24 March 2021
Lent 5 Midweek

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Facets of Forgiveness: *Paid*”

Text: Luke 23:32-48; 1 Kings 19:1-18; Hebrews 12:1-4, 12-15
Psalm 130

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

A few years ago my daughter drove our van out to the mall to do some shopping. And when she came home, it was not the same. The entire front right side had been bashed in and the bumper was barely hanging on. While she was in the mall, someone had hit our van and mangled it up pretty good. And then just drove off. No note. No sorry. Nothing. And we were left with the bill.

Maybe that’s a good picture of sin - someone driving into you, plowing into you, mangling you pretty good. And you’re dented, you’re hurt. Because of what they did to you, how deeply they hurt you. And you may never be the same. Or *they* may not be, when you’ve done that to someone else . . . and just went on your merry way. No note. No sorry. Nothing. But there’s damage, and a bill to pay.

When that happens to you, you could forgive. Pay for it yourself. Let them get away with it. You may not have much choice, if you don’t know who did it. *But is that what forgiveness is?* Getting away with your sin? Or letting someone else get away with it? Is this world really just a bunch of mangled, damaged people driving around? If so, it seems like a problem that will just keep getting worse. For once your car is mangled, you’re not as careful. A few more dents and scratches aren’t going to make much more difference!

Well, you could try to fix it yourself, if the damage isn’t too bad. Last year, my same daughter’s own car got hit - and part of the back bumper got popped out. We pounded it back in, but it’s popping out again. Sometimes we try to do that with sin - fix it ourselves. But if the damage is severe, no way. You’re going to have to get it fixed. Someone will have to pay.

So God did. That’s the final wonderful facet of forgiveness we’ll consider tonight. That for our world filled with sin, our world filled with sinners who drive over and mangle each other, and who even mangle and hurt ourselves, we’re not left on our own. God didn’t look at our damaged selves and our damaged world and say: “Gee, that’s too bad. You’re going to want to get that fixed, I guess!” He came. To fix us. And to pay for it Himself. With His life.

And He knows something about the damage and the pain we get and inflict. Because we've done it to Him. He's the car that's been driven into, smashed, mangled, plowed over, pushed off a cliff - and anything else you can think of, and more times than you can imagine! It began in the Garden and has continued ever since. And then He sent His Son into the world to fix us and to pay, to redeem us, to ransom us, and when He did, what happened to Him? Look at the dents on Him. Look at the abuse He took, look at those nails, the whip marks, the head crowned with thorns. And at the deepest, darkest moment of all that, as He was paying for the sin of the world *not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death*, He said: ***Father, forgive them.***

And you are. The damage you've inflicted, paid for. And the damage inflicted on you, fixed with His resurrection. Though it cost Him dearly.

But sometimes we want more than that. Forgiveness is nice and all, but wouldn't revenge be sweet? Wouldn't it be nice if God raged with us? If He would smite those who sin against us? Elijah thought so.

But smiting is over-rated. After the 450 prophets of Baal were killed, it didn't fix everything for Elijah. He felt run over, so he slunk off, filled with self pity, and ready to die. And when God came to him, it wasn't in the strong and raging wind, earthquake, or fire - it was first with food, God feeding him, and then with a small, calm voice telling him that He would make it right. For, Elijah, there's more going on here than you know. And God's voice and care disarms us, calms us, and talks us off the ledge of our anger and rage.

Which is what happened on Good Friday, as Jesus was hanging on the cross, not raging, but speaking forgiveness. He hung there in the dark, the crowds having thinned out, the earlier furor now a quiet waiting for the inevitable. There was so much more going on than they knew, than met the eye. And yet it was the still, small, calm voice of Jesus that made all the difference. That even softened and changed a centurion's heart. *And that maybe can change our hearts as well . . .*

That's what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer. Forgive us. And make your forgiveness flow through us. To those who hit and run us with their sin.

Which is hard. And sometimes *really* hard. Especially when you go out into the driveway and stare at the damage. You get madder and madder. You stew on it. Brood about it. And anger festers, and turns into bitterness. You can't just forget it - the damage is done. But you *can* stop looking at it and fill your mind with something else. You can, as we've been singing all this Lenten season, *fix your eyes on Jesus*.

So while the damage is still there, something else, someone else is, too. And the damage

might be there for some time. Sometimes the cost of sin and the pain of sin goes on. Even if insurance paid for the repair, maybe your rates went up. And your car won't ever be quite the same. A divorce 20 years ago still effects the holidays now. An injury you suffered still hurts on rainy days many years later. The job you should have had but got cheated out of, a chance you'll never get back. Sin sometimes comes with not only a great but an *enduring* cost. One we may not even realize at first. The damage may be deeper than we know.

But God knew the cost, how great it was. And that only He could do anything about it. So He did. But here's the thing: when we hear about His forgiveness, His paying for us, it's not just the sacrifice - **there's joy there, too**. Not only for the forgivee, but for the forgiver. In fact, sometimes the forgivee, the one who receives the forgiveness, misses the joy. . . . But look at Jesus. For as we heard tonight, *for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*. And know that for you, too, *the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us* (Romans 8:18).

But that joy is not just in the future, while you have to suffer now, while you have to hurt now. That doesn't really work. Even a tiny little pebble of sin can cause a whole lot of pain. That little pebble in the bottom of your shoe, that tiny little kidney stone, that tiny little stone of sin in your heart causes a whole lot of hurt and pain. You need that stone moved. *Now*. You need that stone out. *Now*

So again, Jesus did. He moved a stone. The one that sealed His tomb. Compared to the Rocky Mountains, the Alps, or the Himalayas, it was just a little pebble. But moving it changed the world. Changed you. Had it stayed in place, you'd have no hope. Your dents and mangledness and damage would be permanent. But when that stone is out of your shoe, out of your kidney, out of your heart, it makes all the difference in the world.

And maybe we could say that's the facet of forgiveness we need the most. It's great that our sins are cleansed and washed and covered. It's great that they're far from us and fixed on Jesus. But that He paid for them, He paid for us, to redeem us, restore us, fix us, take the damage away from us, that's what we really need. So that we can live. And so the joy of forgiveness can be ours as well. Not only the joy of being the forgivee, but of being the forgiver. Of having Jesus' forgiveness flow through you. That helps you, too. To see Jesus' work in you, through you. That your damage and dents aren't who you are. They don't define you. Jesus does. His work for you does. And when He does, your story changes. *His* starts to take over. And as St. Paul said, you begin to have His mind in you (Philippians 2:5-11). And now the story of your life isn't the damage you've gotten or inflicted, but the story of the one who redeemed you. And when that happens, there is joy and hope. For the present and for the future. All the facets of forgiveness come together. From the cross. For you. In Him.

This Holy Week we will see that again. All those wonderful facets of forgiveness, shining most brilliantly. So let us watch again in wonder, awe, and joy.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.