



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

29 June 2025

“Wayne’s World – Jesus Wins”

Readings: Genesis 42:3-17, Ephesians 4:31-5:2, Matthew 18:21-22

Close your eyes and try to imagine this this scenario.

You have just had a fight with your best friend.

This was not just an ordinary difference of opinions, but it was a real humdinger.

Not a physical punch up but it may just as well have been that.

You lashed out and told them some home truths about themselves that they really deserved to hear. You even told them some things that you didn't really mean to say but...well...they just sort of slipped out in the heat of the moment.

And some of the things they said about you...you never thought that they could sink so low. I don't want to be friendly with someone like that anyway...

Then, after you cool down, guilt sets in. You have been friends a long time.

And maybe some of the things you said were not quite true.

Come to think of it you would have been cranky if someone said that about you. And what was the fight about anyway?

It's funny... but when you think back it was such a minor issue. The more you reflect, the more ashamed you become about your conduct.

But...they were in the wrong too, it wasn't all my fault.

Why should I have to apologise to them? Let them come to me first, then we can both forgive each other.

Yeah, that's what I'll do. If they come to me first, then I'll forgive them. After that I'll apologise, and we can both make up.

Open your eyes!

Have you ever thought that way? Perhaps I made a few mistakes, but it's not all my fault. Let them come to me first...

My topic today is FORGIVENESS. And do you know one of the hardest things about forgiveness? Why we are so reluctant to forgive others ?

It's because FORGIVENESS IS NOT FAIR. Long after we forgive someone, the wound lives on in our memory. I can forgive you for embarrassing me in front of others. But the next time we are all together again, my anxiety remains.

Forgiveness is just not fair! Because it ignores important issues like right and wrong. Worse still, it takes away the justice of punishment.

In our reading today, Joseph's brothers come to him, without recognising him, and seek to buy food during the famine. Have you ever tried to make sense of the loops and twists in the account of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers?

One moment Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies and throws them into gaol. The next moment he seems overcome with sorrow and hides his face, blubbering like a little baby. He plays tricks on them, hiding money in their grain sacks, accusing them of stealing from him.

Why all these mean, petty games?

It's because Joseph is wrestling with the unfairness of forgiveness.

It is against our character to forgive.

The natural world, where we live, is not a forgiving world, but a ruthless world.

You don't find dolphins forgiving sharks for eating their playmates.

It is a dog-eat-dog world out there, not a dog forgive dog.

Many of us first encountered the rules of survival in the school playground. You have to stand up for your rights, defend yourself, because no one else is going to look out for you.

Many businesses operate under the same harsh reality, as does much of politics and even sport. An umpire never announces, "you were really out, but because you play the game so nicely, I'll pretend I didn't see the ball hit the stumps".

Psychologist Sigmund Freud showed how well he understood the real world when he wrote: "One must forgive one's enemies, but not before they have been hanged!"

Forgiveness is an unnatural act.

But that creates an enormous problem for those of us who call ourselves Christians. Because Christianity is chock-a-block full of forgiveness.

Whenever we recite the Lord's prayer we say: "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us".

Jesus even taught us to forgive our enemies. It was hard enough for Joseph to forgive his own lying, selfish brothers. But forgive your enemies! Why would God require of us such an unnatural act?

I have a few suggestions.

Firstly, because forgiveness is the only way to end the cycle of blame and hurt in a relationship.

In the Lord's prayer, there is a qualification placed on forgiveness. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". It is one thing to be caught up in a tit for tat, dog eat dog cycle with our friends. But it is another thing entirely to get caught up in such a cycle with Almighty God.

On 18th of March, 1990 the world watched a drama of forgiveness acted out upon the stage of world politics. East Germany had just elected a parliament in the nation's first free election. No doubt they had many weighty issues to consider as they grappled with the emergence of East Germany from behind the Iron Curtain. But their first official act was to vote on this extraordinary resolution:

We, the first freely elected parliamentarians of the German Democratic Republic...on behalf of the citizens of this land, admit responsibility for the humiliation, expulsion and murder of Jewish men, women and children. We feel sorrow and shame and acknowledge this burden of German history... We ask all the Jews of the world to forgive us.

The resolution was passed unanimously, members rose to their feet for a long ovation, then paused for a moment of silence in memory of the Jews who had died in the holocaust.

What did such an act of Parliament accomplish? Certainly, it could not bring the murdered Jews back to life. What it did was loosen the stranglehold of guilt that had pressed around the neck of East Germany for nearly 50 years. Five decades during which their Communist leaders had

denied any need for forgiveness.

Forgiveness not only ends the cycle of blame in a relationship, but **secondly it relieves us of the guilt we all feel.**

And it accomplishes both of these through a remarkable transaction. Forgiveness puts the forgiver on the same side as the party who committed the wrong. Through forgiveness we realise that we are not as different from the wrongdoer as we would like to think.

When I was booked for speeding – quite some time ago! It was because I was running late for an appointment. Anyway, it was a four-lane divided road, and the police had no right to set up a radar there. It was only a revenue raising exercise. I was driving safely; there was no danger to anyone... I could go on and on with excuses.

Yet, I also know speed is the number one killer on our roads. Have you ever questioned why some drivers can be so irresponsible?

When I forgive, I am acknowledging that I am human. I make mistakes. Forgiveness helps me realise I am not so different to “them”- the bad guys out there. If I want to be granted the tolerance of a second chance, forgiveness is me saying “I grant to you the same privilege”.

So, the third aspect of forgiveness is that it puts us on the same side as the wrongdoer.

So, how should we score Joseph on the forgiveness scale?

Gen 42:21-23

Not long after his brothers come to him, they talk among themselves

²¹ They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother.

We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life,
but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.

²² Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen!

Now we must give an accounting for his blood.”

We might excuse Joseph’s reluctance to forgive when the brothers first rock up. But surely, he should have acted when they acknowledged their guilt, even if they were not aware he overheard them.

²³ They did not realize Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

Joseph’s subsequent treatment of his brothers seems closer to revenge than forgiveness.

He locks Simeon up for years in the same prison where he had suffered. He plays with their minds by returning their silver, twice. Finally, he frames Benjamin as a thief, knowing how much anguish that would cause them.

However you interpret all these twists and turns in the story, one thing is clear. Joseph is struggling. Because forgiveness is not easy.

Gen 45:1-3

“Then Joseph could no longer control himself ...

and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!”

So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers...

² ...

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?”

But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his

presence.

Even when he reveals who he is, am I being too cynical in suggesting he couldn't resist one final barb?

"Is my father still living?"

Perhaps it's a genuine enquiry. Or is it intended as a taunt?

You don't just have to answer to me, but you will have to confess all to Jacob as well.

And then... finally ... he bites the bullet – & forgives them.

Gen 45:4,5

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers...

"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!

⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you...

Did you notice how the tone has changed from revenge – to being other-person centred?

Don't be distressed or angry with yourselves for selling me. *i.e don't feel guilty about how you mistreated me.* Joseph is now in full-scale forgiveness mode. v.8

"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Now, I don't want to push my theories too hard, but could it be that Joseph is putting his brothers on the same side as himself? *Notwithstanding your dubious motives, God was actually in control of both of us.*

Forgiveness is not natural. It is not part of our usual experience in life. Worse than that. Forgiveness is just not fair! And praise God that it isn't. Because, if it were, none of us would have any chance to stand before God.

The story of Joseph illustrates forgiveness. But it is a flawed example. Christians can look to a much better role model.

Jesus' acceptance of the punishment we deserve, was God taking the initiative to end the cycle of blame.

God's forgiveness, or perhaps you are more familiar with the term 'Grace', overcame the stranglehold of guilt that makes us ashamed to turn to him. And, by doing this as a man, Jesus put himself on the same side as the wrongdoer, although he himself had no need to be forgiven. As a result, we can treat others with the compassion we seek for ourselves.

Forgiveness is never easy. It wasn't easy for God either. When we appreciate the enormity of God's forgiveness of us, somehow, our little squabbles might not seem so significant after all.

I close by asking you to quietly reflect on the following prayer, attributed to St Francis of Assisi, who lived in the 13th century

Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love
Where there is injury, Your pardon Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in You

Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy

Oh master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of Your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving to all men that we receive
And in dying that we're born into eternal life

Oh master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness ever joy.