

**A Sermon for The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
February 23, 2025**



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[Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany – The Episcopal Church](#)

Genesis 45:3-11, 15, (50:20)

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a big, important idea. Sometimes it seems counter-intuitive, like “How on earth could you forgive THAT?” Perhaps not on earth, but on earth as in heaven, we often pray. God’s forgiveness may not be what we think of immediately when we have been wronged, but if we stop, take a breath (letting in the Holy Spirit), we can see our misfortunes in a different light and respond accordingly.

Let’s look at a couple of famous examples. In the fairy tale Cinderella, made into a live-action movie in 2013, the penultimate scene sees Cinderella receiving her glass slipper from the Prince, acknowledging that she is indeed the bride he has been looking for. The whole first part of the movie shows how cruel her stepmother has been to her, trying to thwart her at every turn. Just as she and the prince are leaving her family home, she turns to her stepmother and says gently, “I forgive you.” A lovely moment, almost unbelievable after all she has been through, but magnanimous.

How about St. Patrick? We will hear about his life in about three weeks. Patrick was kidnapped from his native Scotland and taken to Ireland, where he worked as a slave, tending sheep, for five years. He escaped, returned home, and then had a huge change of heart about his enslavers. He returned to Ireland as a missionary among the Irish, forgiving them and offering them peace.

And what about the story we hear today from Genesis? These are the final moments from the story of Joseph, who had lots of reason to resent his brothers: they captured him and sent him off to slavery in Egypt. After many adventures, Joseph rises in authority in Egypt and is equipped to deal magnanimously with his brothers when they show up seeking food during a famine. Joseph can help them, and he does. He could have nursed his resentments about how his brothers had treated him all those years ago, but instead he welcomes them and heaps love and supplies on them. Joseph sees the bigger picture, beyond his own sense of injury. He says, “You meant your actions for evil, but God meant it for good.” How good? Joseph went ahead of his brothers to Egypt, and the whole extended family ends up there, assuring their survival. This is necessary background to understanding the story of Moses, who led all the Jews out of Egypt many years later.

This is a famous story about generosity and forgiveness. Joseph saw the larger picture. He also trusted God. God had been with him through the hard times, when things looked pretty bleak. But Joseph trusted in God and emerged from the hard times with position and power, and he was able to help his family. God was also very invested in this family. It could have been snuffed out right there, if Joseph had decided to be

vindictive. But Joseph saw the larger picture, the saving action of God. Joseph offered forgiveness.

There are many things we can take from this story. One is trusting God that all will be well, eventually. Another point is about not second-guessing God: even when things look grim, God is with us to comfort us in the bleak times. But the biggest point is forgiveness.

Forgiveness is often counter-intuitive. We humans rather like our grudges and would prefer to hang on to them, stoking the fires of resentment for past wrongs done to us. That's easy, and we do it naturally. Without better examples (such as the story of Joseph), that is our default setting: resentment, anger, hate. We all have examples, and I hope you have been able to turn loose of your own grudges.

Even more than forgiveness to others, I think we really need to look into our hearts and forgive ourselves. We all have things in our backgrounds that represent poor choices and unkindness to others.

If there is some grudge that you are harboring, try letting it go. If there is some past deed of your own that you regret, try letting that go, too. Our negative feelings hurt us much more than those who we are resenting. Our resentment, our anger, eats away at us and darkens our view. In this time of Epiphany, try to see such situations in a new light, as an opportunity for forgiveness. Lent is right down the road, so let's get ready for a good six weeks of reexamination of our souls, and let's clean out the dark corners right now. You can do it. Joseph did it. We can all lighten our lives with just a little effort and the grace of God. Forgive, that you may be forgiven.