

MODERN EPIPHANIES OF OUR LORD -- THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND SACRAMENT

Through the Gospel the forgiveness of sins shines brightly; Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit brings comfort.

Genesis 50:15-21

TEXT: *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

The other day my wife and I went for a walk. One of the routes we normally take passes through Roselawn Cemetery. We were half way through the cemetery when suddenly there was a rumbling sound. The ground began to heave and roll in various locations throughout the cemetery. My wife cried out, "What's going on?" Carefully assessing the situation, I calmly replied, "Those are just people who are upset are rolling over in their graves. People say that it happens all the time."

Have you ever wondered about what's going to happen when you're dead and gone? People often change after their father or mother dies, and many times those changes are not good. Many times there are family fights, or a family member who goes wrong, or who leaves the faith. Then it is said, "Dad would roll over in his grave if he knew this or that."

Jacob would have rolled over in his grave if he were to have heard what his sons said about him in their fear and distrust of their brother Joseph who had forgiven them for what they had done to him, saved their lives, and provided generous support and protection while they were in Egypt. In spite of all the love and forgiveness that Joseph had shown them, their distrust of Joseph convinced them to make up a lie about their Dad: ***When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."*** The Bible says: ***When their message came to him, Joseph wept.*** His brothers didn't believe him!

Thank God that Joseph understood sinful human nature and the desperate on-going need we need for the comfort of the Gospel! A MODERN EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD is revealed before us. It is THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND SACRAMENT. Through the Gospel the forgiveness of sins shines brightly; and Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit brings comfort.

Joseph's brothers had a jealous hatred for him from the beginning. It percolated to the point that they plotted to murder him. Instead of murder, they sold Joseph into slavery and told their father that he had been devoured by a ferocious beast. Go back and refresh your memory on the story of how the Lord was using Joseph for the purpose of two things. First to preserve the family line of the Promised Savior who was to be a descendant of Joseph's murderous brother, Judah. And, secondly, to fulfill the prophecy made to their great-grandfather Abraham that Israel would be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. Joseph was the Lord's special tool in accomplishing this. God had used their sinfulness to accomplish his will through Joseph while at the same time graciously planning to root out their impenitence before they would go to hell.

It is to this plan that Joseph refers when he said: ***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*** Don't think for a moment that they didn't understand that to which Joseph truly referred. Yes, the immediate plan of God was to save Jacob's family from the famine had brought these men to the Egyptian courts so that they wouldn't starve, and then find their long-lost brother. But they also had been taught the faith of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were that "great nation" created by the Lord from which the Promised Savior would come. This they knew, and to this Joseph refers. We would say today, "It is because of Jesus that we have the forgiveness of sins, life and

salvation. It is for Jesus' sake that the Lord makes all things work together for those who are the called."

The only difference between today and back then is that the cesspool of man's depravity has gotten bigger. It has swallowed up many whose lives are causing the godly of the previous generation to "roll over in their graves." You and I are swimming in this cesspool. And we also are guilty of sin. The only thing that we can hope for is that God will save us, and the facts of history show that He has. ***God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*** 2 Co 5 Through the preaching of Joseph, forgiveness shined brightly. Through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection, forgiveness of sins for all mankind shines brightly.

Through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works on hearts to comfort and assure us until the end so that none of us will ever "roll over in our graves," but live lives of confident trust until we go to heaven.

Joseph had forgiven his brothers. He had witnessed their hearts of contrition and repentance revealed in their behavior. His forgiveness was genuine and he tried his best to demonstrate that. He sent them back to get father Jacob and the rest of their families and promised to take care of them in Egypt during the devastating famine. But the nature of man's sinful human nature is never to believe, but always to doubt. That's why when father Jacob died, that haunting fear welled up in their hearts: ***When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"***

We struggle with that same sinful nature that shades our faith with clouds of doubt. We recall our sins of the past and still wonder if those sins might somehow revisit us calling for some sort of retribution. We know that Jesus has forgiven us, but we also know what's in here, the heart. We feel the struggle against anger, lust, greed and discontentment, and we also know what Scripture says about those who feel these things. Jesus, our Savior also has said: ***You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.*** Mt 5 And again: ***You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*** Mt 5 How can the same Savior whose veins bled forgiveness of sins also strike us down for what is buried in our hearts and that often erupts with actual sins of sinful thoughts, words and deeds?

Paul blessed confession written in Romans 7 must also be our own: ***What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** Ro 7 Thanks be to Joseph whose word and promise was sincere! When his brothers weakened with doubts Joseph understood what they needed: ***But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*** And so our Savior continues to speak kindly to us. The night before he died on the cross, he instituted the Lord's Supper for those disciples who would yet that same night betray him and deny him. After his resurrection, his first meeting with them opened with words of reassurance: ***Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*** And with that he breathed on them and said, ***"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*** Jn 20 Not only does he institute the ministry of the Gospel, but he sends to them his Holy Spirit who is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

That's why we are here this morning. In addition to our heartfelt worship is the Lord's heart-felt Gospel assurance that he is with us to bless us and to keep us with the power of his Holy Spirit who will keep us in the one true faith until life everlasting.

There will be no "rolling over in your graves" when you die, for according to the Lord's own word, he will keep you safe until your last breath on earth will be followed by your next breath being drawn in heaven. Amen.