

when he comes into his kingdom. I heard this and thought, "You miserable wretch. It's you, just as it's too late for me. You've wasted your life, now your life is over.

But Jesus did not see him that way. Did you hear what he said to that thief ?! "...Today you will be with me in paradise." Could it be that it is not too late? Could it be that no matter how many yesterdays he has wasted, what matters most is today? He has received the promise of paradise because he seized today and trusted in Jesus. And if it is not too late for this thief-- perhaps it is not too late for me. Maybe even now there is something loving I can do for him, some deed through which I can show my faith in him, my love for him, my devotion to him.

Like this thief, I have wasted so many yesterdays. But what is true for this thief must be true for me: what matters most is today. I can be faithful today. I can stand by him today. I can receive the promise of paradise today.

Extinguish one candle and then return to your seat.

When Ryan leaves the microphone, Rick will return to the lectern and offer the invocation.

THE PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Open our minds, Lord Jesus, that we may receive the precious things which you are waiting to give. Open our hearts to your promises in new ways so that we may be a blessing to one another and to your world. Give us courage to face the challenges and struggles of life. Through your Word and Spirit grant us the reassurance that you will be with us and strengthen our faith to withstand the trials and temptations that lead us away from you. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory", number 84 in our Hymnal.

The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.

*HYMN OF PRAISE "In the Cross of Christ I Glory" *The Hymnal #84*

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...

*CALL TO CONFESSION

The One who received sinners and ate with them invites us to feast on God's forgiving love. Let us come to claim the healing and reconciliation he offers as we confess our sin together and pray the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a brief period of silent prayer. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

We are much better at nursing grudges that we are at healing old wounds, Lord. We fear the retribution that may follow our attempts to reconcile with those we have wronged, more than we fear the loss of their friendship. When we are the injured party, we value restitution more highly than restoration. You have entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to us, and we have neglected our duties to reach out and restore in your name what has been broken. Deny us an easy peace until we have done all we can to bind up broken hearts and to salve the bleeding wounds caused by our sharp words. Bless our efforts to reach out in love to all who are in pain so that together we may live in peace and know the fullness of your love for all. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God takes away our reproach. In Christ we are a new creation, and God does not count our sins against us. God robes us in Christ's own righteousness and celebrates our return, so let us rejoice and live as ambassadors for Christ..... Friends, believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Having been reconciled to the Father through the love and sacrifice of Jesus, his Son, let us now

be reconciled one with another and share the peace of Christ. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will and then take a seat.

The Children's Choir will come forward and begin...

LENTEN SONGS AND SCRIPTURES

The Children's Choir

As the children leave, the liturgist will return to the pulpit and say,

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We are each part of the body of Christ, and have been called to live at peace with one another while we share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world. May each of us give as we have been blessed so that grace may abound here, and everywhere. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

"Adagio in E Minor" - J.S. Bach

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

***DOXOLOGY (In Unison)**

The Hymnal #592

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;

Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... Bless, O God, the offering of these gifts. Use them in your work. Help us to produce the fruit that you expect to receive and to offer it to you as you have commanded. Bless the fruit of our labor that we bring forth in this offering. Bless too every thought, word, and action that we have that they may be the fruit of true repentance, and of strong faith and a caring love. We ask it in the name of Christ Jesus, our crucified redeemer. Amen.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

THE ANTHEM

"Give Me Jesus"

The Choir

arr. Helvey/Courtney Dionté George, alto saxophone

After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say....

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, beginning at the twenty-first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 838 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to

you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.”

The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation. Thank you for your service.

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When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our sermon text today is taken from the thirty-third chapter of Genesis, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #28 in your pew bibles.

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. And he put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.

He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And when Esau raised his eyes and saw the women & children, he said, "Who are these with you?"

Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."

Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?"

Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord."

But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."

Jacob said, "No, I pray you, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favor have you received me. Accept, I pray you, my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough."

Thus he urged him, and he took it.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Heal an Old Wound”

This season of Lent, we are learning how to “die to ourselves” so that we can “live for Christ”. We are preparing for that death, by making our bucket lists. And instead of writing our own, we are asking, “What would God want on my bucket list?” Last week, we placed the first item on our list, “Become a student of the Bible.”

This week we add the goal, “Heal an old wound.”

An adolescent boy or girl enters Junior High and enters a stage of their education that includes more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic. Here they learn to make their way through a world of complex interpersonal relationships. One begins to develop strategic relationships, and build friendships as much for a need to succeed or, at least survive, in the larger world where a good word from the right person can make you or break you.

Past childhood friendships built on mutual interest, common origins, or God knows what intangible, give way to those calculated to help you fail or succeed. The clubs of High School and the sororities or fraternities of college aren’t there yet, but bullies and mean girls, studs, & prima donnas are.

A few years before the same kid wouldn’t have cared what anyone thought when he wore his red boots and red felt cowboy hat to school. Little girls might show up dressed as Ariel. No one cared if the whole world knew they had Disney characters or Sponge Bob on their underwear.

But something happens when you get to Junior High that tends to only increase in importance as one gets older and, at least in their own minds wiser. A kid who may have been one of our good friends a year before, is now totally uncool. To be seen chatting them up, or hanging with them is seen by the “In” crowd as being worthy of a social death sentence.

When I entered Junior High, I wasn’t one of the social pariahs, but neither was I one of the cool kids who wore the right clothes, lived in the right neighborhoods, or had their own “inner cool” that

could put anyone in their place when they were messed with. But, oh how I wanted to be. I don't know why, but I wanted to be a cool kid. I don't know why anymore than I'll ever understand why my dog Lucky used to like to dig out of the fence and chase cars and trucks. I don't think Lucky ever really knew either, not even after he caught the one that punched his ticket to dog heaven.

When you get to be my age one learns that a good friend likes you with no strings attached. A friend worth having will be there when everyone else has left you behind to chase the next fad of the moment. They'll like you for you and will let you be yourself and never judge you for it.

The price of my admission into the outer perimeter of the cool crowd was the jettisoning of one of my other friends from elementary school. Eddie's family had moved around a lot since his dad was in the military, but he had finally retired and settled in Texarkana at the beginning of 6th grade. Eddie and I became buds and remained good buds until about a month into the 7th grade. Maybe it was because Eddie was relatively new, or because he had acne, or because he wore a black leather motorcycle jacket all the time, or because he didn't want to hang out with kids too stuck on themselves to return a hello or good morning as he passed and greeted them in the hall at school. Whatever it was, it was made clear to me that Eddie was never going to make it to any social level above the seventh level of hell, and if I didn't want to join him, I had better sever all ties.

But Eddie was like that friendly stray puppy that you can't keep from following you home. It doesn't matter what you do to shoo him away, he just keeps coming after you, wagging his tail expectantly with every step. At some point to have to not just throw something in his direction, you have to make it land, and make it hurt, before he understands that there is no future in following you.

That's how it was with Eddie. Nothing I said made any difference. It wasn't until one day in Speech class that I had a chance to throw something in his direction that hurt, and he understood. There was no future there. And as he took his seat after his mortification, he looked at me. His eyes spoke only of his disappointment and hurt. No anger. No threats. Just an agonized, "Why?"

So I negotiated the rest of Jr. Hi, Sr. Hi, and college. Much later seminary and the world of the church. As it happens, Eddie did as well.

Artists have a term for what happened next, The word is "*pentimento*". When a painter in the middle of a painting changes his mind about the picture's composition, he paints it out and then paints over it. But over the years, the image beneath the final composition begins to bleed through. One example of this effect is a portrait of Napoleon's Chief of Police in Rome that hangs in London's National Gallery. The painting has a large curtain on the left side of the painting. But over the years a fully painted bust of a boy's head on top of a small column has begin to bleed through the light colored curtain. Experts believe that this was a bust of Napoleon's son, who was known as the King of Rome and that it was overpainted with the curtain after the fall of Napoleon but before the completion of the painting.

A lot that we take for faith in the Christian church is *pentimento*. Stuff just bleeds through. Stuff we don't even think about, that we didn't even know about. Stuff that we didn't know was in us about what we believe about God, and understanding scripture. It just bleeds through as time passes.

That's how it is with old wounds. I don't know what kind of wounds Eddie carried for the 50 years we were estranged. But I know that when I cut him, I cut myself deeply. At first I could see the blood on my face and hands easily, when I looked in the mirror and the wounds were still fresh, but over the years I painted over them with new friends, new experiences. Not surprisingly I discovered that there is a whole new life **after** Junior High School.

But as the years passed, I found I would suffer a blow and old wounds would open up, and they would bleed through whatever I had used to cover myself. An unkind word was all it took and when I examined and assessed the damage later, I realized that I looked like Curt Schilling's sock.

I could preach a sermon about forgiveness. Teach a lesson about confession, and the wounds would open. It was never ending. In this case, I knew that the only cure for having done something I knew was wrong and hurtful, was to do the right thing. So I googled Eddie and found his mailing

address in Whitewright, TX and sat down and wrote him a letter, remind him of what I had done and asking his forgiveness. In this case, I was right in thinking that Eddie hadn't dwelt on my duplicity and betrayal and had built a very happy life for himself and his family. He was also a Christian and offered me his forgiveness and begged me not to let those events of so long ago sadden me for one more minute. He even went so far as to say he would look for me at our 50th high school reunion in 2021.

In the movie, *The Shack*, I immediately seized upon a bit of wisdom offered by the older Native American figure representing God the Father to the protagonist, Mack, dealing with the hurt inflicted upon him by the man who kidnapped and killed his youngest daughter. When Mack was unable to forgive as he thought it must be done, the Father offered this: "Forgiveness is not letting go of all your anger. It is merely removing your hands from his throat."

For fifty years I had refused to deal with what I had done. For fifty years, I would hear the word forgiveness, and my hands would instinctively wrap themselves around my throat and attempt to squeeze out the life and light that Christ had placed within me. And now, I found I could breathe. The wound of a half a century was healed. The healing began the moment I wrote the letter. While Eddie's gracious response was good to receive, when that letter went in the mailbox, I had done what I could do. "In so far as it depended upon me, I was at peace with everyone."

All of this is possible because of the forgiveness freely given through Christ's death on the cross. He declined to take his hands and squeeze the life or the evil out of those who jeered at him and spit on him as he walked the painful streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, where he instead allowed those loving hands to be nailed to the cross.

Many years ago, executives of the Time-Life Corporation discovered that the company's profit margin had shrunk to an alarmingly low level. Consequently, they began an intensive effort to contact subscribers whose subscriptions were about to lapse with letters making an emotional plea to renew before it was too late.

(For example, "Will you dare face your children without "Time" magazine on your coffee table?")

IBM had finally developed a huge word processing machine that could produce enormous quantities of these letters. The name of each subscriber was put on a separate little plate and run through the vast machine. Whenever a nameplate came along that was within six weeks of expiration, a series of dots and dashes at the top of the tab triggered an electronic impulse that caused it to drop into a slot. The name was then affixed to one of the "heartbreaking" letters which was then folded, stuffed into an envelope, labeled, stamped, and dropped down a chute to the basement where a United States Branch Post Office was set up--all without a single human hand touching the operation.

The system worked flawlessly for a while, until that fateful day in when one of the nameplates stuck in the machine. A few days later a lone shepherd in Montana received 12,634 tear jerking letters asking him to subscribe to "Life" magazine.

The shepherd, who hadn't received a letter of any kind in years, took his knife, carefully slit open one of the mailbags and began reading his mail. Three weeks later, red-eyed, weary from reading 12,634 pieces of mail, he made out a check for \$6.00, filled out a subscription coupon and sent it to the President of Time-Life personally, with the following note: **"I give up!"**

That's a story to remember, when you begin to wonder about the limit of God's mercy. You don't have to plead or beg for it. You don't have to ask Him 12,634 or 1,000 or 100 times for it. You don't have to ask him even once for it. God's mercy is always there, always being offered, always present to you. God has already said, "I give up: I love you; I forgive you."

Christ has made it possible.

So go ahead.

Heal that old wound-- especially if it is yours.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Gracious and merciful God, the problems facing our human family are very grave and we are no longer isolated from one another. We are confronted daily with our addiction to violence, our hatred and our greed. We are heartbroken and long for some good news. It is so easy to forget that your Son, Jesus, is always the good news and that he has given us the remedy for our brokenness. "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." He spoke so clearly. We ask your Holy Spirit to remind us of this again and again. We ask you for the gift of hope in our lives and know that we need to turn to one another for the confidence and assurance that we will emerge from situations, that, at present seem hopeless. Banish fear and anxiety from our hearts.

Today we gather to affirm one another and to remove the barriers that seem to sour our relationships and keep us at a distance. Heal our short tempers and weaken our grip on the grudges we hold. Prompt us to be lamps in this present darkness-- especially to one another. We believe in the power of your grace to change our lives and we promise this day to be once again open to that grace. Bless us with peaceful spirits and heal our long neglected wounds so that we may desire nothing more than to be reconciled with one another and with you, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to forgive and to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace", #2179 in our *Sing the Faith* hymnal supplement.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace" *Sing the Faith* #2179

*THE BENEDICTION

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remain with you always. Amen

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE "Let There Be Peace On Earth"

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
With God as our Father, brothers all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.
Let peace begin with me; Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment & live each moment in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis