

them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Do you think that was easy? Was any of it easy for Jesus? Of course not! But that's what he did to save us. He suffered even more than Joseph had, to the point of giving his own life, to take out the garbage for good. To take away all our sins. We like to pretend that we're God. Well, this is what it means to stand in the place of God—forgive!

For every time you have murdered in any way, Jesus has forgiven your sin. Maybe you are one of the millions of people who in a difficult time in your life decided to get an abortion. Jesus has forgiven you. Maybe you, like those brothers, have destroyed relationships with your bitterness and resentment. Jesus has forgiven you. Maybe you have murdered others with your anger. Jesus has forgiven you. And remember what forgiveness means—Jesus has taken that sin away, never to be brought up again. It's gone.

And now this is what our second lesson encouraged: *"Be imitators of God."* A child who imitates a superhero tries to copy everything that superhero does. He pretends to fly around. He puts on a cape. So be like your superhero. What does God do? He forgives. And now he wants to help you do your best God impression—forgive! Start like Joseph did—in your family. Forgive your spouse—all the time. Forgive your brothers. Forgive your parents. And then keep expanding outward. Look for the bitterness in your heart and stop letting it cloud over your life. *"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry"* (Eph 4:26). Pray that God allow you to forgive as in Christ God forgave you.

It's not that easy. I know! In fact, it's completely impossible, unless you have Jesus filling in the holes in your heart. But with Jesus, forgiveness is possible. I wonder if there isn't a modern example of Joseph in the families of the victims of the Charleston church shooting a few weeks ago. After those awful murders, something didn't happen that we've become used to seeing. There were no riots. There were no additional shootings. Instead, those Christian families stood in court and forgave the troubled killer. They even invited him to come back and study the Bible more with them. I'm sure it wasn't easy. Not one bit! But those Christians knew what Jesus had done with their own sins. So even after losing their loved ones, Jesus' love for them was big enough to let them forgive. What about you?

Genesis 50:15-21
Pastor Nathan Nass

The Fifth Commandment
July 12, 2015

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.

It's Not That Easy!

Today should be an easy sermon. We're to the fifth commandment—"You shall not murder." How hard can that be? Let's try it. How many of you have murdered someone? Good. Amen. Of course, I'm not going to stop there. But the fifth commandment sure sounds easy, doesn't it? If there's any commandment we have kept, it's got to be this one. Isn't this the first thing that comes to people's minds when they try to judge whether or not they are good people? "I haven't killed nobody! I think I'm doing alright." Talk about setting the bar low. We like to set our standards at what we think we can easily do. "You shall not murder." Check!

Except it's not that easy. Just look around our country. How much violence do you see? Do you know how many people are murdered in the U.S. in an average year? Between 10,000-15,000. Do you know how many people in the U.S. die from gunshot wounds each year? Over 30,000. It's pretty naïve to think that this fifth commandment stuff is easy. But we're used to it, right? Violence in movies. Violence in video games. Violence on the news. And the result is that we just get numb. But God is not happy. Our world doesn't value the lives that God has created.

And the murder rate really shouldn't surprise us, because we as a society have decided that it's okay to take someone else's life. In fact, over 55 million children have been murdered in the 42 years since the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. I guess sometimes the Supreme Court gets things wrong. Somehow we and our society have lost the value of life. Instead, we like to play God and pretend we have the choice to decide who should live. And if we feel we get to decide whether unborn babies should live, it's only natural for us to decide how long elderly people should live too, right? Human beings have

always enjoyed playing God.

So, “You shall not murder.” Is that really something we need to talk about? Yes, because it’s not that easy! And then Jesus has to go and say what he said in our Gospel lesson today, “*Anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment*” (Matthew 5:22). It turns out, the fifth commandment doesn’t deal just with physically killing someone else. Piled on top of all the violence and the abortions is an even worse epidemic that affects us right here in our church—bitterness, grudges, and anger. God values life so much, that any anger or bitterness against someone is really murder in God’s eyes. So let’s try this again: How many of you have murdered someone? It’s not that easy! How many of us are actually murdering someone right now?

Who is it for you? Who is the one you are not willing to forgive? I know you’ve got a good excuse. At least, we always think we have an excuse, right? “He doesn’t deserve it. What she did was just too wrong. He’s done it too many times. She’s just going to do the same thing again. He’ll think he’s won.” Sometimes the truth is that it just plain feels good to be angry at people we don’t like. It’s not hard to come up with excuses to be bitter. It’s not hard to come up with reasons to be angry. So if anger and bitterness and grudges are equal in God’s eyes to murder, then we have a problem. It’s not that easy! So to help us, today God wants us to look at Joseph.

If anyone had a right to hold a grudge, it was Joseph. Do you remember his story? His ten older brothers were jealous that Joseph was their father Jacob’s favorite son. So they wanted to kill him. To just do away with their spoiled brother. But in the end they decided to sell him into slavery in Egypt and tell everyone that he had been killed by a wild animal. As bad as we’ve been hurt in our lifetimes, I wonder if any of us has a story that even comes close to the story of Joseph. He wasn’t hurt by a stranger. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers.

Now we fast-forward 40 years. By God’s grace, Joseph was now second-in-command of Egypt. His brothers had moved and joined him there. And now Jacob had died. And Joseph’s brothers were terrified. They thought, “*What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?*” It had been forty years, but those brothers knew the power of grudges. Time does not heal all wounds. We don’t forget what others have done to us. You know how easy it is to stew for a day or a week or a year—to get madder and madder about something. So the brothers were afraid. With dad gone, what would Joseph do?

And old father Jacob was worried too. By the time he reached age 147, he realized it’s not easy to forgive! So before he died, he left behind these instructions for Joseph: “*I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.*” In Hebrew, the word to “forgive” means to “lift up and carry something away.” To forgive does not mean to overlook or ignore or cover something up. It means to pick it up and carry it away for good. Forgiveness is a little like taking out the garbage. You can’t just

ignore the garbage or cover it up—unless you want it to stink. It needs to be carried away, never to be brought back again. That’s forgiveness. That’s what Jacob wanted for his family—“Please forgive your brothers.”

So what would Joseph do? He wept. Because that’s exactly what Joseph had already done with his brothers’ sins. He had forgiven them. To him those sins were gone. So to see them brought up again, to see the fear on his brothers’ faces, Joseph wept and said, “*Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?*” What did he mean? To hold a grudge is to put yourself in the place of God. Because punishing sin is not our responsibility—it’s God’s. You can be sure that every single person’s sins will be dealt with by God—in one of two ways. Either you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus who paid for your sins with his death on the cross. Or you will pay for your own sins eternally in hell. Either way, punishing sins is God’s responsibility, and he will do it well.

So what Joseph did was forgive. In fact, he had forgiven his brothers long before they fell on their knees before him. Because forgiveness doesn’t demand an apology. Forgiveness doesn’t impose any conditions. Forgiveness isn’t limited to a certain number of times or a certain type of sins. When you forgive someone else, it means that God’s love for you surpasses any lack of love you’ve been shown by someone else. It means that with God’s strength you’ve taken their sin and thrown it away for good. To Joseph, his brothers’ sins had been taken out long ago.

Because every hole that those brothers had put into his heart had already been filled up with God’s grace. “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*” Joseph could look back over his life and see how his gracious God used even terrible sins to accomplish good. Ten men sold their younger brother into slavery. Forty years later, God used that younger brother—now a ruler in Egypt—to save their lives. With God’s help, Joseph was able to look past the hurt and see how God filled him up when others let him down. I hope you can too! God’s strength gave Joseph the power to forgive.

So are you ready? It’s not that easy! By nature, we always see other people’s sins more clearly than we see our own sins. We want God to hold others accountable for their sins. We just don’t want God to hold us accountable for ours. Do you see the problem? We want God to forgive everything we’ve done to him. But we don’t want God to ever forgive what that person did to us. So we stand in God’s place and murder those around us by letting bitterness and anger live in our hearts. Just think about this: It makes no sense to be bitter over someone else’s sin when at the same time we rejoice that God has taken away our own. How can we be angry with God for the grace and patience he shows to others, when God has shown the same grace and patience to us?

Because here’s what it really means to stand in God’s place. When Jesus was on the cross, this is what he said to the murderers—not just random killers out there, but to the very people who were murdering him. I think you remember his words: “*Father, forgive*