SOVEREIGN GRACE KILLS WITH KINDNESS
Genesis 43: 15-34

Please review this week's catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new this last Sunday at the worship service?

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when someone did something kind for you or said something especially kind to you. How did the kindness affect your feelings about the person and your relationship to them?

Usually, when someone is kind to us our hearts are full of gratitude and affection for the person. Normally, kindness motivates us to want to know the person better and causes us to trust him or her more. Whether people acknowledge it or not, God has been and is being enormously kind to every person who is alive. However, due to our stubborn and sinful hearts we do not always respond to his kindness with gratitude and affection. Yet, God continues to pour out his kindness upon us. The apostle Paul, in Romans 2: 4 tells us why it is that God does this. He says, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" It is God's plan to kill our love for the pleasures of sin (repentance) by showering his kindness upon us. We will discover in this lesson how it is that God kills our love for this world in order to create love for himself.

STUDY

1. Summarize what happened on the 10 brothers' first trip to Egypt and then during the last year since they returned home.

God, through the hardship of famine brings the ten treacherous brothers of Joseph to Egypt. They come to Joseph, the ruling prince of Egypt, and bow before him, ignorant that he is the brother they betrayed. God, through the Egyptian prince, causes them to admit to each other that what they did to Joseph was wrong and that God is justly angry with them for their grievous sin. Joseph tells them that if they want to live, to have the eternal life that God offers they must leave one of their brothers behind, go back to Canaan and then return to Egypt with their youngest brother and Joseph's only full brother, Benjamin. He tells them that if they will bring Benjamin back to him, they will live but if they do not bring Benjamin back, they will die of hunger from the famine as he will give them no food. The nine brothers return to the land of Canaan and inform their father Jacob that another of his sons, Simeon, is missing and a captive in Egypt. After a tumultuous year and only after all the food they brought back is gone does Jacob agree to let his youngest and dearest son go to Egypt.

2. How does Joseph respond when he sees the 9 brothers have returned and have brought along Benjamin? How does this compare to the promise he made in 42: 18-20?

When their unknown brother, the prince of Egypt sees Benjamin and realizes that they have done as he asked, he tells his steward to bring them to his house so he can have lunch with them. <u>Joseph does more than he promised.</u> He doesn't simply sell them grain and let them all go home but he invites these backwoods boys to come to his palatial home and enjoy the finest food that can be found in the world with the most powerful man in Egypt.

3. How do the nine brothers respond to the kind invitation to Joseph's house?

These guilt-ridden men view the invitation to lunch as a fraud. They cannot imagine that this ruler of Egypt, who was so hostile upon their first visit, could possibly be this kind, nor this faithful to his promises. Their consciences have been awakened to their sinfulness and they cannot imagine that they can be the recipients of any kindness. They view the prince as the agent of God in their condemnation and so they consider any action by him as merely a pretense to cover up his true motive, which is their destruction. They are frightened. They are sure that Joseph's plan is to attack them and to enslave them.

4. Summarize, in your own words how they reason with Joseph's steward before entering the house. What are they trying to prove? What are they not admitting to? Do they deserve to be made slaves? Why do they think they don't deserve to be made slaves?

We know, as the readers, that Joseph, as God's agent, put the silver in their sacks out of pure kindness. He was acting graciously. They are sure that the money was put in their sacks in order to give the Egyptians a pretense for making them slaves. <u>They view an act of kindness as an occasion for condemnation.</u> The reason they think in this way is because they are so aware of their guilt in selling Joseph and understand that God must be angry with them and out to get them. However, they do not cast themselves upon God for mercy <u>but try to outwit God</u>. They know they are guilty of treachery but they argue that they are not guilty of thievery. So they seek to justify themselves, to escape being enslaved by arguing that they are innocent of stealing and so shouldn't be made into slaves. However, the reality is that they deserve to be made slaves. Rather than depending upon the grace of God, they try to justify themselves and to prove they are innocent, which they certainly are not. This is infallible evidence that they have not yet come to full and complete sorrow for their sin. While they know they are guilty of sin, yet they are unwilling to acknowledge that they do not deserve to be treated well. If they really knew that they deserved to be dead and in hell they would not be afraid and they would not be trying to argue that they are innocent.

5. The English Standard Version translates v. 23: "Peace to you. Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money." (NOTE: The Hebrew word "shalom" is the word translated "peace" that the steward uses. This word refers to being in the state of salvation. It is to have God as your friend, not your enemy. It is to live in the security of his care, in harmony with his people, enjoying his favor.) The steward describes what is really going on in v. 23. State in your own words what it is that he is saying to them. Why do they not need to be afraid?

God's salvation is with you, you do not need to be afraid. God has determined to be your friend, not your enemy and so you have nothing to fear. The evidence that he is for you is that he put treasure in your sacks. God's peace is not given to them because they deserve it. God has not made the promise of salvation to them because they are not thieves or because they have done anything to deserve his kindness. He is giving them salvation graciously, not according to what they deserve but according to his determination to love them. <u>He put the money in their sacks to show them that he is for them and will care for them.</u> The money isn't put there in order to trap them or set them up but to show them that he can be trusted.

6. How should they respond to this announcement by the steward of God's grace?

They should be overwhelmed with gratitude and full of sorrow over their sin. They should confess their sins to God and Benjamin and their dad. They should not be afraid. They should be full of joy that God has chosen to forgive them and save them not because of anything they have ever done but because of his great mercy.

7. What are some ways God has put "treasure in your sack" to show you that he can be trusted? Has God's generosity produced both sorrow for your sins and joy in his grace to you? Why or why not?

God kills our love for this world to create love for him by showering us with unexpected and undeserved kindness.

8. What kind of a house do you think Joseph lives in? Use your imagination, what are some ways these brothers may have been treated as they await Joseph's arrival?

The steward, to prove to them that he is not lying to them brings out a healthy and happy Simeon. Then he takes these murderous men, these proud men and he has their feet washed and he feeds their donkeys. He invites them to come sit on the shaded patio that overlooks the lush plains along the Nile River. He serves them some of the finest drinks to be had in Egypt. This is a startling picture. The country bumpkins, who sold the owner of this house into slavery, are being treated with the best hospitality that is available in the wealthiest nation on earth. This house they are in is a mansion by any standard. The construction and the fixtures and the servants are the best and most beautiful that

money can buy. They are in the home of the second most powerful man in the world.

9. What do they do while they wait for Joseph to come home for lunch? Why do they do this?

They go out to their dirty and dusty packs and get out their rough sacks full of the agricultural products of the land of Canaan that is in the midst of a two-year drought. I think v. 24 is one of the most pathetic verses in the Bible. They prepare this gift as if it will somehow make them more acceptable to this wealthy and noble prince. They believe that they can impress Joseph and persuade him, by their gift to be kind to them. These brothers foolishly think that their gift makes a difference in how the prince is going to deal with them. They have no idea that this prince knows everything about them and yet has determined to be kind to them, in spite of who they are and what they have done.

10. Why is this action absurd?

First, Joseph needs nothing that they have. What can they give to Joseph that he does not have or could not have at the snap of his fingers? In addition their gift is agricultural products from a land that has been overcome with a drought for the past two years. Second, they owe Joseph everything they have. He would be right to make them his slaves for the rest of their lives. He would be right to throw them into prison. There is nothing they can do to earn his favor or to obligate him to be kind to them. He is kind to them, not because of who they are or because of their gift to him, but because of who he is.

11. How does Joseph respond to their gift? How would you describe his attitude and behavior in vv. 27-29?

When Joseph arrives they bring in their offering of shriveled fruit and tiny almonds and pistachio nuts and small jars of honey. They set it before Joseph and bow down before him. Joseph, seated upon his ornate chair does not even mention or notice the gift but instead asks them how they are doing! He asks them about their elderly father and if he is well. He is very gracious and kind to them.

12. What does God need from you? What can you do for him to get him to like you? What does God owe you?

God does not need you for anything. There is nothing you can give him that will make him like you or obligate him to you in any way. God owes you death and hell for that is what you have earned by your sin, just like the brothers deserved to be made slaves.

13. What has God done for you?

He showers you with kindness, he provides for your needs and most of all he sent Christ to do for you, what you could never do for yourself. He sent Christ to obey his laws for you. He sent Christ to suffer and to die the death you deserved. He offers Christ to you as your servant. Jesus himself said, "I did not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many." God is not interested in what you can do for him he is only interested in you trusting that he has done everything for you in Christ. The only people who are going to be accepted by God are those who have stopped trying to serve God and who are depending upon Christ to serve them.

14. How does Joseph respond to the presence of his brother Benjamin? Why does he respond like this?

He turns his gaze upon Benjamin and asks, though he does not need to ask, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" In one of the most tender and poignant scenes you could imagine Joseph says to his mother's other son, whom he has not seen for 22 years, since he was a young child, "May God be gracious to you my son." The last time Joseph saw Benjamin was when Joseph left to go find his brothers. The last time he saw him he was a little boy standing next to their father waving goodbye to his favorite older brother. How many times during those years of slavery and imprisonment had he thought of playing with his little brother and wondered if he was safe or if the murderous brothers had killed their only rival for their father's affection? Joseph cannot control himself. His affection for his brother and relief and joy at seeing him well, overcomes him and he quickly

excuses himself from the prostrate brothers and goes to an inner room where he weeps his joy and his love before God.

15. Why does he not reveal himself to his brothers at this time?

He does not know everything about these men and so he cannot yet reveal himself without placing his younger brother in jeopardy. He has yet to find out if they are repentant sinners or simply sinners who are trying to escape what they deserve by trying to outwit God or to buy God off. He yearns to live in unbroken fellowship with all of his brothers but he does not yet know if they want to do so. So he continues to hide his identity and the depth of his love for them. He has brought them into his home in order to serve them, to show them they have nothing to fear from him. However, they do not yet know that they can do nothing to serve Joseph. Their salvation is in the hands of the one they betrayed and turned over to death and who does not need them for anything. Yet this wealthy and powerful man who has the right to destroy them is seeking to serve them so that they will repent and trust him.

God kills our love for this world to create love for him by serving us and refusing to let us serve him.

16. What does Joseph do during the lunch that is unusual?

He seats his brothers in their birth order from oldest to youngest.

17. How do the brothers respond to this? (See Psalm 48:5-6, Isaiah 13:8 & 29:9 for other uses of the word translated "astonishment" in the NIV.)

They are stunned, terrified, appalled, overwhelmed by this strange "coincidence". For a moment they are confronted with their vulnerability and they are overcome with fear because of it. They have no way to explain how this could possibly happen.

18. Why does Joseph do this?

Joseph, acting as God's agent was demonstrating that he knows them, he knows who they are and what they have done. By arranging the seating chart, Joseph is seeking to break their illusion that they are in control of their destinies. He is seeking to confront them, not only with the grace of God but with the all-knowing, all-powerful nature of God. These are proud men who think they can outwit God. These are proud men who think they can somehow avoid facing who they are and what they have done and God, through Joseph's seating arrangement is confronting them with the fact that they live before God. He sees all and knows all. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "All things are open and laid bare before the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

19. How long does the "astonishment" last? What happens to them? (NOTE: The last sentence in v. 34 literally says, "They drank and they became drunk with him.")

Joseph has been kind and terrified them by his knowledge. Yet they forget everything in the enjoyment of all of his good gifts. They eat his food and drink his wine and enjoy it all, while forgetting the terror they felt moments before.

20. Has God ever "astonished" you with an evidence of his sovereignty and omniscience? Have you ever forgotten some way that God "got your attention" in the enjoyment of his gifts?

By the arranging of simple details God reveals that we are not alone and we are not our own. We know that the almost car wreck, the appearance of a friend at just the right time, the recovery or the loss of some item of value was orchestrated by an invisible, omnipotent hand. These revelations of God's sovereignty are designed to move us to turn away from our love for this world and to cause us to love him supremely. We are to be overwhelmed with the knowledge that the one who sees all cannot be outwitted or appeased but must be submitted to with joyful abandon.

God kills our love for this world to create love for him by giving hints of his sovereign power.