



September 13 – Lessons from a snowball fight

As a Midwesterner, my childhood was filled with a lot of snowball fights. One snowball fight has been on my mind this week. I must have been about 8 years old when my older two brothers challenged me and my next younger brother to a snowball fight. We gladly accepted. The older brothers were up in the tree house, and we were near the house. We feverishly made snowballs and started throwing. As soon as we started throwing snowballs at them, the reign of terror came from above. It hurt. Bad. I got hit on the head and was “seeing stars”. After a few minutes, we surrendered and sat down while the yard stopped spinning.

Several years later, while sitting in class watching a science experiment, the memory came flooding back. They had dipped the snowballs in ice ahead of time and waited for them to freeze. I asked them later that evening and both just laughed. Sometime after college, one of the brothers approached me with tears in his eyes asking forgiveness for all the mean things that they had done. The snowball story came up. I had forgotten about it and told him it didn't matter. It was all in the past. I was a punk too. Thankfully, we both matured and have grown from all of it.

The story from Genesis resonates deeply with me this week. I think of that conversation with my older brother. I think of similar conversations I have had with younger siblings asking forgiveness for the mean things that I had done. In each of these conversations, there was a similar pattern. The person asking forgiveness had carried around the weight of that a lot longer than the one who was harmed. I see that in Joseph's brothers. After decades, they are still holding on to what they had done and waiting for punishment. After Jacob's death, they now fear for their own lives. They fear Joseph will demand all of them be put to death.

Joseph had let it go. He had let it go a long time before this moment. All of them had grown. They had all matured. What mattered most was the relationship moving forward. This chapter highlights how difficult reconciliation can be. It takes a lot of work to rebuild. Sometimes those who wronged others have the more difficult time moving forward. Forgiveness will do that. It changes the power dynamic. It is only the one who was wronged that can pave the way forward.

There is an earned wisdom in this text. It teaches us a lot about what forgiveness and reconciliation look like. Forgiveness and reconciliation are work. They are a choice. It is about making a choice not to live in spaces of pain and intolerance. If we remain focused on our own wounds or the wounds we have caused, we get stuck in those moments. Instead, we can lean into the lessons learned and blaze a path forward.

All of us have made mistakes. Those mistakes should not define us. Those mistakes are not the whole of who we are. Today, on God's Work, Our Hands Sunday, we take a collective breath. We gather here, in this sanctuary, and find hope in the knowledge that God forgives us. We gather with other people who are broken or have made mistakes. Together, we become the body of Christ. We become the hands and feet of God, a people tasked with sharing the love of God with the world.

As we finish worship today, we will gather in Grace Hall and put our hands to work. We will prepare kits and quilts for those in need around the world. Together, we find that we can make a big difference in the world. Together, we become something more. We become the body of Christ.

Know that your sins and mistakes are forgiven. They do not define you. Set those burdens down and join in the work of sharing the love of God with the world around us. Amen