

PENTECOST 17, C – October 6, 2019  
SCRIPTURES – Hab. 1:1-4 & 2:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:1-14; Luke 17:1-10

*“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”*

Last week we were shown on the news an amazing example of forgiveness. You probably saw this picture: of 18-year-old Brandt Jean hugging former Dallas Police Officer Amber Guyger. Coming home at the end of a 13-hour shift, she had entered his brother Botham’s apartment, thinking that it was her own. When Botham got up to see who was coming in, she shot and killed him. She was convicted of murder and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Even so, during his testimony last week Brandt said to her, “I want the best for you, because I know as well that’s exactly what Botham would want for you. And the best would be to give your life to Christ.” And then he was allowed to give her a hug. The judge also hugged her, and gave her a Bible. Outside the courtroom the mood was far different. Protesters, incensed at the short sentence, shouted, “No justice, no peace!” I understand their anger, as it did seem to be a very light sentence for killing a man who was simply eating an ice-cream cone in his own apartment. Did not God’s prophet Habakkuk cry out in much the same way? ***“The law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth,”*** he complained to God. ***“For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.”***



There are many opinions regarding Brandt Jean’s actions. You could waste a lot of time on social media reading and responding to them. The important thing to see is that his words and actions were motivated by Christ, and by the faith in Him that he saw in his brother.

That faith raises questions, for Jesus is not always easy to believe in and follow. At times He speaks some very difficult words, such as today’s: ***“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!”*** What does He mean? Is He warning of those who tempt you with sexual sins, which are so prevalent; or with greed and covetousness? No, it doesn’t seem so. Notice that Jesus immediately follows His warning with the command to forgive one another, even seven times a day, if need be. He knows that the worst temptation is to have you not forgive but to remember sins; to bring them up, or even make them up, and use them as a weapon. ***“Woe to those who do this!”*** Jesus says, for by refusing to forgive you attack Jesus Himself and the faith that is in Him. He is, above all, a Lord who forgives. Forgiveness is His weapon against your greatest enemy: the sin that would condemn you to hell as an

enemy of God. As He forgives your sin, God not only rescues you from hell and gives you a new and blessed future with Him; He also changes your life here and now. That change is to be seen in your life and heard from your mouth.

You see, God has great plans for you. **“[He] saved us and called us to a holy calling,”** St. Paul says in 2 Tim. 1. He goes on to say, **“He gave us [this calling] in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”** Think of that: you were in God’s mind and heart before creation, and so before time, began! His love for you and His desire to rescue you from your sins moved Him to send His holy and eternal Son into time, into this world of sin as a weak and lowly human being. It moved God to place your sins, and the sins of the world, upon Jesus. By His death as a sinner Jesus ended sins’ power to condemn you or control you, and by His resurrection from the dead He **“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.”** Christ’s life and immortality, which are His power over sin and the suffering and death it brings, God then made yours **“through the gospel”** – not simply the message of Jesus and His forgiveness, but the receiving of Jesus and His forgiveness. You see, as you receive forgiveness you receive Jesus and His life. You are made eternal; a lord of life as He is Lord of life! His victory over sin and death is now given you to live... and speak... and share. Forgiving is your holy calling. As you forgive, you share Jesus and His life. This is what Brandt Jean did as he forgave Amber Guyger, the murderer of his brother.

Refusing to share Christ’s forgiveness brings down the woe of God’s anger because you are not only rejecting the sinner; you are rejecting your holy calling. You are rejecting Christ Himself. This is why Jesus cried out, **“Woe to the one through whom temptations to sin come!”** Spare us this, Lord! **“Increase our faith!”** asked His disciples. We do need faith, for we are greatly tempted to hold onto sin; tempted in a variety of ways.

Impatience is one. It is a temptation that Habakkuk felt. **“Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise,”** he complained to God... **“and You idly look at wrong!”** Sin does need to be confronted and punished to keep it from taking over. Why, then, does God seem to let bad things and bad people go on, and even prosper? His answer is not easy. **“Wait,”** He tells Habakkuk. **“The righteous shall live by his faith.”**

Waiting for justice, for the punishment of sin, is hard, and often doesn’t seem fair. And so, we’re tempted to talk, to bring up sins and spread them... and even assume them and make them up. Jesus’ opponents did this. They spread lies about Him. They accused Him of being a drunk and eating too much. The fact that He received sinners like prostitutes and other despised people made this accusation sound reasonable. And so, the rumor spread.

Jesus tells us, and shows us, God’s way of dealing with sins: **“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”** Can we really forgive sins seven times in one day? Yes! Jesus forgave

the sins of the world, all sins of all people of all time, in one day. He bore them all in His flesh and offered up His life as a sacrifice to cover them. He forgives you every day! You, then, must also forgive.

Can you do this? Yes! You must! If you believe in Jesus, that He is God in flesh whose death was for you, for the forgiveness of your sins, then you are His. You are in Christ! You, then, are a servant. And as a servant of Christ, forgiveness is your duty. You must do what He says. Jesus will help you to do so. Receive His forgiveness, and He will renew your life! This has been His plan since before time began.

Brandt Jean confronted Amber Guyger's sin with Christ's great weapon of forgiveness; a weapon far more powerful than the one she used to take his brother's life. If she receives his forgiveness and, as he urged, draws near to Christ, Jesus will draw her to Himself, and to his brother Botham. She will pay for her sin in this life, as she should. But after this life, she will see her sin no more, but will see Botham, whose true life no one could take away. She, along with all of us who live in and share our Lord's forgiveness, will see Him who ***"abolished death and brought life and immortality to light;"*** even Jesus Christ, our Lord. To Him be glory forever! Amen.