

I taught Bible School this past week, I ~~had the~~ sixth grade class. It was a good experience for me.

One lesson we studied was on revenge. Marcy and Karen were on the sidewalk looking at Karen's new camera. I'm so excited, said Karen, it's the camera I've always wanted. Just then Rosie appeared, rollerskating toward them. She crashed into Marcy and Karen, the camera went flying, then broke apart as it hit the pavement.

Why did you do that, screamed Karen. I can rollerskate on this sidewalk responded Rosie. As Rosie skated away Marcy said to Karen? How are you going to get even?

Class, I want you to fill in Karen's answer.

I'd call her parents and tell them they have to buy me a new camera.

I'll get her, I'm going to wreck her rollerskates.

I'll wait until I can get her alone, then I'll beat her up.

I'll never speak to her again unless she apologizes and gets me a new camera.

I'll smash into her and hurt her as badly as I can.

So the answers went until I came down to the last student. And she said, I will forgive her. Out of a class of eight, everyone would get even, would get revenge, ~~except~~ except one who would say, I forgive.

How I was thankful for that one student. With her answer we were able to talk about revenge, and what it produces, how it only hurts more and never heals, how forgiveness brings a new beginning, a new start. We read the story of Joseph, who though he was sold into slavery by his brothers forgave them and saved them in the time of drought. I was proud of the way I had taught them all.

Then came Friday, the last day of Bible school, every class was rushing to finish their craft projects, the sixth grade was in the craft area with the fourth grade. Everyone was painting.

My prize student came up to me. The only one of the eight who answered I would forgive. There was paint all over the front of her ~~black~~ shirt.

There was anger in her eyes. Look at what that girl in the black hair did to me. She's going to be sorry. She's going to have to buy me a new shirt.

What about forgiveness, I asked. But shirts cost money. She'll have to pay.

For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God, ^{For} You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry Abba, Father, it is the spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children ~~of God~~ then heirs, heirs, of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

It is a jarring note on the end of a beautiful passage. Paul writes of our assurance, of how we are children of God. Heirs who need have no fear. Pauls writes what we teach in Sunday School and Bible School, what we will teach here next year as we prepare young people for confirmation. We can live confident that God has chosen us in baptism, adopted us, given us his Holy Spirit and nothing can ever rob us of our inheritance as children of God. But then there's that jarring note

Provided we suffer with him in order that we might also be glorified with him.

Provided that we suffer with him. For Paul that meant that five times he received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times beaten with rods, once stoned. Three times shipwrecked, a night and a day adrift at sea, in danger from rivers from robbers from his own people from the Gentiles. He endured hunger and thirst, cold and exposure. And more.

Yes, Paul suffered for Christ. He will certainly be glorified with Christ.

But you and I will not be Pauls. We are not called to wander the world in missionary preaching. At least not yet have we been called to that.

If I were Karen, I would forgive her, a young girl announced so boldly. But when her time came to be Karen, she did not choose the suffering of forgiveness. She'll pay for wrecking my shirt was her cry, Forgive us our ~~sins~~ ^{trespasses} as we forgive those who trespass against us we pray so easily.

Forgive me. Don't do justice today, God. Forgive me. Don't make me pay
for what I have done. Forgive me. As I forgive?

~~So, we will not need to go very far to suffer with him.~~ We will not
need to become wandering missionaries. ^{speaking suffering} Here at home, day to day there is much
witness, much suffering needed in the face of a society that screams take care
of yourself, stand up for your rights, grab the most for yourself that you can.
Forgiving, loving caring will always be the lonely road, love returned to those
whose words cut us deep will always bring pain, forgoing justice and making
them pay is the way of the cross. ^{it never ceases to surprise us how often we are}

When we cry Abba, Father, it is the spirit himself bearing witness with
our spirits that we are children of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided
we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

It's just the kind of thing that will happen to children of one this
world rejects. They will suffer. For we walk to the beat of a different
drummer, ^{in a different way} our lives are lived for a different homeland, our journey is toward
a different city, we are citizens of a kingdom not of this world.

We forget that. We fool ourselves to think that we can have ^{both of} both this
world and the next. But many are called and few are chosen, and as St. Paul
teaches, we are called and will be chosen, provided we suffer with him that
we might also be glorified with him. Each day we decide whose we are. In our
living we declare whether we are the world's or God's. Let us pray:

Abba, Father, we are your sons and daughters. ~~We are Christ's.~~ Keep us
in your ^{Word} word and in your way that we may live in this world as citizens of
your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.