

SEVEN WORDS - SORRY  
A SERMON BASED ON 2 CORINTHIANS 7:2-16  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
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10:00 a.m.

Families can be tough.

All of us have had that moment of trying to get along

with the family member that makes it challenging for us.

Grandpa, who is so caught up in politics,

all he can do in conversation is rant about the government.

Grandpa for whom a change of subject

is local politics instead of federal politics.

Your sister, who mentally checked out of the family so long ago,

that she spends the whole time you are together

with her phone under the table, texting rarely looking up.

Uncle Joe.

Uncle Joe who loves big boy pop a little too much.

Which allows him to go from wildly obnoxious

to asleep and snoring on the couch in under 10 minutes.

Your cousin from out of town,

who makes you wonder if maybe you are the redneck  
as he manages to make his way around the globe,  
somehow insulting every single group and identity,  
while proclaiming to be progressive.

If you are especially blessed in your family,

then you have all of those people around the one table.

And if you don't have a really embarrassing family member  
in your family, then I've got something for you to consider.

It might be you.

With all the personalities, getting along with family can be tough.

It is true in our families,

it is no less true in a church family.

One of the many, many things I love about Scripture,

is just how very real it is.

People who don't know the Bible will accuse the church  
of having a 'pie in the sky' type book here,  
a book that is naive to our day to day.  
a book that doesn't tell us or help us with anything relevant.  
There are those who would give Lord of the Rings  
more authority and influence in their lives  
than the Bible.

Generally, this is because they haven't read it,  
or have only read little parts.

I am often surprised that these folk will nevertheless  
have the arrogance to tell us that we are silly or deluded  
for paying close attention to what it says.

Read it, then get back to us.

But here today, we have yet another example of Scripture showing us  
that it does in fact speak to everyday.

This time, we have overheard someone in the family  
who has said, 'sorry.'

How much would we love to hear that word from others?

How much do we feel we are entitled to that word?

How much do we perhaps need to say that word?

Sorry.

It is considered a quintessentially Canadian word.

We say it when someone bumps into us.

We say it when we ask the server for ketchup.

We say it when we win.

We say it when we were slow to answer the phone.

We say it when we make another's phone ring.

Sorry.

It is a word that we use a lot, sorry.

But it is a word that

because of it's frequent use and overuse,

because we make fun of how much we as a nation

say it,

it is a word that has lost some of it's spiritual power.

The word sorry, comes from very old English

It is a word that shares its origin with our word sorrow.

Sorry is a word that is more than a Canadian sorry.

Sorry comes from sorrow.

To be sorry is to be distressed, grieved, pained.

Here, in his letter to the church in Corinth,

within this church family

we hear it in its full meaning.

By implication and inference from the text,

we can deduce that the apostle Paul has had a rough go

in this church family from the city of Corinth.

So much so, that Paul has actually

been avoiding going back to see them.

It seems he had sent them a letter instead.

Earlier to our passage today he wrote,

“I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia

and to come back to you from Macedonia,

and then to let you send me on my way to Judea.

I call God as my witness – and I stake my life on it –  
that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.

I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.

For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad

but you whom I have grieved?

I wrote as I did, so that when I came

I would not be distressed

by those who should have made me rejoice.

I had confidence in all of you,

that you would all share my joy.

For I wrote to you out of great distress

and anguish of heart and with many tears,

not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.”

There had been tension in the family.

The apostle Paul was not well accepted in Corinth.

There were disputes about who the best teachers were,

who had respect,

and Paul was low on the list.

On top of that, Paul had challenged the morality of some in the church,  
calling for the church community to call out and censor  
the bad behaviour.

The church in Corinth was happy to see him move on.  
I imagine it wasn't pretty.

But as you heard, he wrote a letter,  
a letter with great distress, and anguish,  
and with tears.  
It would have been a hard letter to read.

Paul wouldn't go back to Corinth.  
He didn't want to step into that mess.  
But he kept the connection going,  
and he followed it up sending his colleague Titus.

In chapter seven is where we learn how Paul's letter was received.  
What Titus found, was a church that was sorry,  
not Canadian sorry, but sorrow sorry.  
Distressed, in anguish and grief.

So Paul, having received a visit and update from Titus  
sent these words to the Corinthian Church.

“Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it.

Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you,  
but only for a little while – yet now I am happy,  
not because you were made sorry,  
but because your sorrow led you to repentance.

For you became sorrowful as God intended

and so were not harmed in any way by us.

Godly sorrow brings repentance

that leads to salvation and leaves no regret,

but worldly sorrow brings death.

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you:

what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves,  
what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern,  
what readiness to see justice done.

At every point

you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.



So even though I wrote to you,

it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong  
nor on account of the injured party,  
but rather that before God you could see for yourselves  
how devoted to us you are.

By all this we are encouraged.”

The Corinthians were sorry.

But not in a get you off my back,

try and be polite and not cause waves kind of sorry.

It was a sorrow that grew them, and grew their faith.

See what godly sorrow has produced in you:

what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves,  
what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern,  
what readiness to see justice done.

Your sorrow, your sorry,

lead to repentance.

Repentance and repent are church words

that have become tough for us to hear.

When we hear them, we hear anger, judgement and lack of acceptance.

It is a John the Baptist word.

He is the one who seemingly yells at us from the desert to repent.

Not surprisingly,

when we are barked at, yelled at, pushed into a corner,  
our defences go up.

When we are told how, told when, told off,

we get our backs up.

I don't need you to tell me anything.

I don't need to change.

If anything or anyone needs to change,

it's you, your tone, your implications, your manner.

I don't need you to tell me.

Unfortunately being barked at to repent is what we have sometimes

experienced from 'church people'

or think we have experienced when questioned on our behaviour.

When we are pushed at by a pushy preacher yelling repent,  
it isn't the word 'sorry' that comes to mind.

We bark back,  
don't be telling me what to do, I'm fine.

But sometimes in a space apart,

in the quiet,  
when all the other noise stops, and you can reflect  
and consider,  
sometimes, if the light of the Holy Spirit gets in  
we can realize,  
that we are sorry, that we are in sorrow,  
for what has gone down,  
what we have done, what we have said  
the consequences that are our fault.

In the space apart,

in the quiet,  
comes the realization,  
that we indeed need a change, need to change.

that we need a path different from the one which has hurt us,  
paralyzed us, frightened us, destroyed us, trapped us.

That we are in fact, sorry.

And so it has been our misunderstanding,

that when John the Baptist yells from the wilderness,

from that space apart,

from that place of quiet,

when he cries out, 'repent!'

that it isn't a cry of judgement,

it is actually gospel. It is good news.

The meaning of repent and repentance in Scripture and the early church,

was very different from the judgemental tone we hear.

The second part of the Bible is written in ancient Greek.

They make preachers learn it in school.

The word for repent is metanoia.

It means a change of mind.

A transformation.

Metamorphosis is a change of shape;

Metanoia is a change of the nous, the mind,

the innermost consciousness,

that region that lies below both rational thought and emotion.

It is a change in your core, your soul.

Repentance is the transformation of your soul.

It is the insight, the realization, the freedom,

of hearing, sensing, knowing,

you need to change and be different.

All that has frightened you, tortured you,

hurt you, deformed you and distorted you,

can be transformed.

John the Baptist's cry from the wilderness,

is a cry of hope. Repent. Turn back. Change. Be transformed.

Prepare the way, he advises.

Make straight paths, he urges.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation

and leaves no regret

It is a straight path to transformation and restoration.

Let God flow into and through the broken parts of your heart.

The parts that make you sorry.

Because when God gets in.

Change happens.

Repentance happens.

A transformation of the soul happens.

This is what Romans 6 is about.

'Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus  
were baptized into his death?

This is so we can live a new life.

The old self was crucified with him,

died with him

so that we are no longer slaves to sin.

No longer slaves.

No longer struggling under the shackles of trying to be perfect,

of the fatigue of carrying regrets,

but neither being lazy to think that there could be no change,  
no transformation, no growth to holiness.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation  
and leaves no regret

Paul says count yourself dead to sin.

Don't let sin reign in your mortal bodies so you obey its evil desires.

Don't offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness.

Offer yourself to God as those who have been brought from death  
to life.

Offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

Sin shall no longer be your master.

Some will abuse God's grace.

Some will think, "What I do doesn't matter,  
because God will forgive me anyway.

Philip Yancey calls it 'grace abuse'.

Grace abuse can leave us lost again, and back in slavery.

Grace abused can leave us lost and enslaved all over again.

Sorry as God intended, leads to repentance.

Godly sorrow lead to change,

if you've said you are sorry,

and nothing has changed in you,

then it is what Paul calls worldly sorrow,

it is a sorrow that asks nothing more from you than

a Canadian sorry.

It is a dead end for restoring relationship, building community

bringing the family back together

and deepening your relationship with God.

Like the Corinthians, when shown something you have done

that has caused hurt,

say sorry, let change happen, let it be the beginning of repentance

and a new way.

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you:

what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves,

what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern,

what readiness to see justice done.



Godly sorrow brings repentance

that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

Say sorry, and see what God can do in you.

Amen.