

July 5, 2020

Promised Restoration

Jeremiah 23:1-8

Jennifer Tucker was 18 when she got the Confederate flag tattooed on her ankle. Because of the permanence of tattoos, Tucker, now 36, thought she was simply stuck staring at that flag for the rest of her life. "I just needed to get that symbol of hatred off of my body. Every time I attend a group meeting or protest, I make a new friend. And I don't want to be standing next to them with a confederate flag on my leg,"¹ Tucker said. By chance, a friend sent her a Facebook post from Gallery X Art Collective tattoo parlor in Murray, Kentucky.

Tattoo artists Jeremiah Swift and Ryun King understand that sometimes people make mistakes. That doesn't mean they should be stuck with reminders of those mistakes forever. So, the tattoo artists chose to dole out their own kind of grace and forgiveness in the best way they knew how. They would offer cover-up tattoos free of charge to anyone who wanted one. No questions asked. "If you feel it's time to change your hate, or have been reformed but been too broke to cover your mistake of a tattoo, come see me. You'll get a class tattoo for free that can start your path to being the person you were meant to be."² Their studio has covered up swastikas, gang symbols, and Tucker's Confederate flag.

The student book author writes "Although the people's sins and disobedience had caused the Lord to disperse and drive them into foreign lands, divine love would eventually draw them back and restore them."³ We all make mistakes. That's simply a fact of life. God sees our mistakes, and while God may be displeased, as Jeremiah tells us, God always welcomes us back into the flock. "I myself will gather the few remaining sheep from all the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply" (Jeremiah 23:3).

Today, Jennifer Tucker has a cartoon pickle on her ankle where the Confederate flag used to be. She has joined peaceful protests and worked in her community to fight racial injustice. Jennifer grew up. She changed. But she always carried a symbol of her past with her—until now. God knows us. Our hatred, transgressions, and mistakes cannot escape the eye of God. Fortunately, God's love is so much bigger than us, and it will follow us and cover us and bring us home through our best days as well as our worst.

1. What symbols of mistakes from your past do you still carry with you today?
2. How has God shown grace and forgiveness to you for mistakes you have made?
3. What are ways you can extend grace to others who need your forgiveness, whether they are seeking it or not?

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¹From edition.cnn.com/2020/06/14/us/tattoo-shop-hate-gang-symbol-cover-up-kentucky-trnd/index.html.

²From facebook.com/galleryxartcollective/photos/a.335446730654426/637024710496625/?type=3&theater.

³From *Adult Bible Studies*, Summer 2020, by Robert Gardner (Cokesbury, 2020); page 52.