

“The Completeness of Forgiveness”
15th Sunday after Pentecost & We Remember 9/11
September 13, 2020
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Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 18:15-20

Poem: “*Forgiveness Is*” by Unknown Author

“forgiveness is not about letting someone off the hook for their actions, but freeing ourselves of negative energies that bind us to them.”

Last week, we talked about forgiveness being a process. Jesus walks us through the process – talk with the person who wronged us, if that doesn’t work – bring two or three witnesses, if that doesn’t work – bring it to the church, if that doesn’t work – let them go.

Today’s lesson about forgiveness puts us at a place of forgiving, but not forgetting. The letting go part of the process as we are empowered to not place ourselves in situations where those who have hurt us are now disempowered in continuing to hurt us.

Here is an example and I’m sure some of you have heard a similar story. “A husband frequently abused his wife for many years, even to a point where she had to be placed in the hospital. Because of what her church and culture taught about forgiveness and divorce – a “till death do us part,” she always forgave her husband. One night when he was beating his wife, he later felt remorseful and asked her for forgiveness. As she held their children who were crying, a 10-year-old son and an 8-year-old daughter, after years of abuse, she refused to forgive him. His response was – “you must forgive me

– the Bible says so – “till death do us part!” For the sake of her children, she forgave him. Church and culture once again dictated to this woman, her answer.

One night she wanted to please her husband, so she made a nice family dinner. Roast, potatoes, and all the fixings. But first would come the hot soup and salad. The family of four sat down at the dinner table and as he took too fast of a bite of the hot soup, he burnt his mouth. The children are now on foster care and he is in prison serving a life sentence for murder.

“Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” We can forgive from our hearts, yet we do not have to forget nor put ourselves in situations where we empower our abusers or those who purposely hurt us to keep up the abuse. As my Mama would say, “I am no bodies punching bag.” The completeness of forgiveness means that we release ourselves of any guilt placed upon us and that we do not place ourselves and our loved ones in danger. Completeness is letting go and moving forward toward inner peace and inner healing. **Forgiving and being forgiven is the experience of grace – which empowers us to show grace unto others. But this is also a time when forgiveness has to go both ways – forgiveness does not mean we empower others to take advantage of “seventy-seven times.”** Wickedness is when those who abuse take advantage of “seventy-seven times.” I cannot believe that Christ would have us stay in an abusive relationship – but would have us go through the process and if nothing changes – to let go, especially for the sake of our children.

The good thing about forgiveness is the experience of grace. Praise be to God that we get to experience God’s grace daily and in the process of

forgiveness – even if it takes “seventy-seven” times. How many times have we fallen short ourselves from our own call? How many times have we fallen short from our promise to Iao Church? I believe it is okay to say – “I forgive” but also move to a point where I will not place myself or my family in danger. I will follow the process of forgiveness as I experience grace given – grace received.

When we are wronged – our hearts and souls go through this sense of hurt, anger, maybe even mourning. For many of us we go to our default words and process on how to handle that individual or situation. Maybe find ways of “payback” – “revenge” or even wish karma upon them. What is really happening to the inside of our bodies is this rage that is eating us up from the inside. After our initial reaction – what we should try to do is begin the process that Christ called us to do last week. – Not an easy task – Amen Church? Not an easy task, especially for this extrovert and coming from a culture of “Maschismo” – meaning a “manly culture.”

Imagine with me the hurt, anger, the sense of great loss 19 years ago. Many still mourn that great loss of life. September 11, 2001. A young lady on one of the hijacked planes calling home to speak to her husband – “Tuesday, 9:47am. Hi Baby, I’m...Baby you have to listen to me...carefully. I’m on a plane that’s been...hijacked. I’m on the plane, I’m calling from the plane. I wanna tell you I love you...please tell my children that I love them very much, and I’m sorry babe. I hope to be able to see your face again Baby. I love you. Goodbye.”

Our faith tells us that she will see her husband and children’s face again. When they are rejoined in paradise with Christ, with our God. She

apologizes to her husband – being on that plane, help him not to feel guilty or angry, we can only guess why she apologized. She hopes to be able to see her husband’s face again. “I love you” – love of husband – love of children – love of family. If we were able to say “goodbye” to our loved ones, would we leave them with hope, gratitude, faith in God? Moments like these are a time in which we find our faith exceedingly difficult. Why did this have to happen? Where are you God in all this pain, grief and why did you allow this to happen? How can we forgive those terrorists and those who supported them? We do not know the people or their skin color who were jumping off before the towers went down, but what our faith calls us to believe is that they have met the same Creator. There are no easy answers and no easy processes to undergo. Let us receive God’s grace as we work through the process of our fear, anger, guilt, or whatever we may be going through at this moment in our lives. Prayer is always the best starting point. For those of us who do meditation as a spiritual practice, we know the benefit of silence. For those of you who do Yoga as a spiritual practice, you know the benefit of movement.

I am sure we can find many examples but today, I am thinking of Nelson Mandela after 26 years in prison in South Africa. He could have sought that his supporters rise and seek retribution because of apartheid. Instead of hate, Mandela began and sought the process of forgiveness and reconciliation as part of his spiritual practice as a Christian witness. As hard as it is, forgiveness of people has intentional consequences.

Another example can be on December 1, 1997, Missy Jenkins pulled her hair into ponytails, slipped on her sweat pants and a long-sleeved shirt

and went off to school. She joined her classmates in a prayer meeting. At 7:45 that morning they said their last prayer together, she and 35 classmates. As they dismissed the prayer meeting, another classmate by the name of Michael Carneal walked into their midst and opened fire on them. Missy took a bullet through her left shoulder and it lodged in her spine. Missy will never walk again.

About a year or so after that she was in Louisville. At a press conference, here is what Missy said. “Michael took so much from me that day, but I believe hating him is a wasted emotion. Besides, hating Michael will not make me walk, nor bring my classmates back to life. The media especially wants to know how I could forgive. It’s what God teaches us to do.” People find the grace to forgive others.

So, let us close with this Iao Church, brothers, and sisters out in our virtual world. The completeness of forgiveness requires a process of hard work. It is not a magic wand that we can wave, and all will be well. We make human relationships difficult on ourselves as a society when we place untenable expectations on each other. I am of brown skin and I cannot change that – then you cannot be in our social club type of attitude. We not only move on from the past – but we also move away from those who refuse to stop hurting us and others. Our task is to seek God’s grace and release ourselves from the burdens of the past and change our future to that of love. Once again, let us seek to – feel deeply and love fiercely, even if it is a process.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.