

Sermon from Stephan Hill, Locum Vicar

Given 14/09/2014

This reading comes in many parts but only one outcome. Last week we talked about conflict in church, this week we are considering the other side of conflict - Forgiveness.

Try this exercise

Lord forgive me and say it 49 times. As with so many of the stories of Jesus, the parable of the debtors arose out of a question that was posed to Jesus. Simon Peter said to him: "Master, if my brother sins against me, how many times should I forgive him? Seven times?"

As he asks that question my mind cannot help but think about children and how they will sometimes confess something they do wrong expecting to get praise from a teacher or a parent because they were so honest.

In the same sense, Simon Peter by asking this question is not expecting rebuke but praise. He is expecting Jesus to say: "Excellent Peter, go to the head of the class you get A+. When measured against scribal law, Peter thought he had done something good as the law read:

'If a man transgresses one time, forgive him. If a man transgresses two times, forgive him. If a man transgresses three times, forgive him. If a man transgresses four times, do not forgive him.' What Peter has done is to take this law of limited forgiveness, multiply it by two and add one, and then sit back with a smile on his face and say: Now how is that for being a great guy? And he surely must have been taken aback when Jesus said you must forgive seventy times seven.

So what was Jesus attempting to say to Simon Peter?

1. First, forgiveness carries a price for the forgiver.
2. Second, there is also a price for the forgiven for they now should become a forgiving soul.

This is what makes people so different from the rest of Creation. It is the mystery of having this sense of forgiveness. So let us meditate on this great mystery of forgiveness.

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Forgiveness is very much part of every part of our life especially the sporting life.

Use the different sports to highlight the idea of forgiveness.

AFL and Rugby you stay on and are tried later. Also if you have a poor record you can be extra penalized.

Soccer you are carded off.

Basketball there are both team and individual fouls.

In driving you are allowed 10 points and then 12 months off, but you can take the chance for 12 months that you will not break the law.

What sort of forgiveness are you into?

What sort of forgiveness do you apply to different situations?

What does forgiveness mean to you – something to remind people about?

What sort of forgiveness do you apply to yourself?

Is this the sort of forgiveness that Jesus uses?

There was once an elephant with a very loving mahout. This elephant loved to serve and did whatever he was asked by the mahout. The mahout took care of the needs of the elephant but was too poor to procure enough food for it. So each evening, on the way back from their work, the mahout used to make a round of the houses in the village. Most people gave the elephant something to eat. But once, they made a stop by the tailor's shop. The tailor, instead of offering something or nothing to eat, took his needle and gave the elephant a good prick. The elephant and his mahout went off in silence.

Some months later, a destructive storm took place. Many houses collapsed including the tailor's house. Many people lay under the debris so several survivors rushed to the mahout to get the elephant to help in the rescue operations. The elephant willingly went with his mahout. The elephant lifted logs and enabled those trapped inside their fallen houses to come out alive. Then the elephant and the mahout arrived at the tailor's house and the elephant lifted up the log. The tailor rushed out. But as soon as he was out, the elephant let the logs crash once more on the tailor's house.

Elephant's are said to have a good memory. But when a memory stores single minded remembrance and there is no forgiveness it

becomes destructive.

When I first started counselling I came across the term "Transactional Analysis" and how people use that in running their lives. Christian forgiveness is not about a transaction.

Today's readings are a reminder to all of us to store in plenty the sense of forgiveness of others for the sense of forgiveness makes us true and authentic humans.

There is a lot of wrong doing in our world. We all are indebted to one another for something or the other. God created everything. All that He created was good. Yet the crown of His creation did Him and Creation much wrong. Imagine the injustices and exploitive actions we perform with each other! Whether we believe or not, whether we forgive or not God still offers all the benefits of creation without limit.

Without this sense of Forgiveness we humans would die embittered creatures. But, if like the Triune God, we let the Sun shine on evil as it shines on good, then, we will see evil turn into good.

So how are we to act?

Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the others face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand, "Today my best friends slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking until they found an oasis where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from nearly drowning, he wrote on a **stone**, "Today my best friend saved my life."

His friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?" The other friend replied "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Real forgiveness keeps on leaving the sins of others and our hurts in the past. Yet Jesus understands the difficulty of such forgiveness. To keep on forgiving is a God-like characteristic. It is contrary to human

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nature. So He gives a parable beginning in v.23 which will help us obey His commandment to keep on forgiving.

Jesus fully understood the price of a lack of forgiveness for it destroys the person and the community to whom they belong.

Jesus asks "Is this not a better way to approach life than to store in our hearts a lack of forgiveness? "

Shalom my friends.