

Often very difficult...but essential. A sermon preached on May 27, 2018 at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder. Beginning of a short series on Jesus' parables.

This morning, we begin a short series on Jesus' parables.

Those brilliantly illustrative stories Jesus told not to communicate detailed theological truths

Or just sheer information,

But to elicit from us some reactions that often reveal dimensions of ourselves that we try our best to ignore or suppress

Parables – little stories that reveal to us something of the kind of persons we are and why we need the kind of redemption Jesus brings.

For example – this morning's reading from Matthew – the unforgiving servant – an illustration of how very difficult, but oh so necessary it is to live as forgiving and forgiven people

In a couple of weeks, we will consider the parable of the laborers in the vineyard from Matthew 20.

If you think your reaction would NOT have been one of utter indignation, if you were paid for 12 hours of hard work

What others are paid for only one hour,

Never mind earlier agreements, you are kidding yourself!

Whatever else the employer was, he was also simply unfair to those who had worked the hardest

Ever notice how failure in others can be tolerated, but good fortune, Especially if it is better than ours, Is hard to take!!

And undeserving good luck experienced by another is perhaps the hardest of all, Especially in matters as important as money!!!

To this morning's parable then

Some general questions:

- What really is forgiveness?
- How can one do it?
- What does it do for the forgiver?
- How do you find it in yourself to forgive when you think you cannot or do not even want to because of anger and hate of which you cannot let go?
- How do I keep the past the past
- How can I handle/correct my anger in a way that is Biblical and pleases God?
- How can I recognize my rebellious attitudes toward God and others and correct them?

Some unalterable givens about forgiveness:

- ✓ Forgiveness of sins by God is a major Biblical doctrine. It is where salvation by Jesus Christ really begins.

If God did not forgive us, we would be weighed down under a load of guilt that could never be removed.

- ✓ Christianity is supremely a religion of forgiveness. It begins with God and comes down to us.
- ✓ God himself has shown how to forgive others; we are to do for others as he has done for us.
- ✓ there is a direct connection between our own spiritual health and our willingness to forgive those who have sinned against us
- ✓ Forgiveness is not easy – BUT IT IS NECESSARY AND MUST BE PRACTICED CONTINUALLY.

To the parable itself then

It begins when Peter comes to Jesus with a question we have all asked at one time or the other.

Someone had done him wrong and he had forgiven him.

The same person had done it again and Peter had forgiven him

He did it again and Peter had forgiven him

He did it again and Peter forgave him again,

But this time he got mad.

So he comes to Jesus with a question we can all understand

Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?

Peter wanted to know how much guff he had to take.

He wanted to know when you quit turning the other cheek.

Everyone has felt that way.

You take it and take it and take it again and then the egit does it again and you say,

One more time and its no more Mr. and MS Nice Guy or Girl.

So, Peter wanted to know how long he had to wait before he could really let the person have it.

Peter though does not wait for an answer.

He had one ready

As many as seven times (vs. 21)

Peter had reasoned – the Rabbis taught you had to forgive a man three times and then you could retaliate.

So Peter thinks – I'll just double that and add one Seven, after all, is a perfect number

A commendable number seven – yes?

Most of us get frustrated if we have to forgive somebody twice.

By human standards what Peter said is enormous.

Yet Peter's attitude was wrong – he wanted to put a legal limit on forgiveness
He wanted a number, a limit a place where he could finally say,

No more Mr. Nice Guy....

Jesus' answer – vs. 22 – **not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times**

Peter, you have it all wrong.

You do not count the number of times you forgive someone

FORGIVENESS IS UNLIMITED.

That is the teaching, but Jesus knows the truth of unlimited forgiveness is hard for anyone to understand,

So Jesus told the story of the Unforgiving Servant which involved two servants.

Opening scene – a king wishes to settle accounts.

His CPA's begin going over his books and they find that one servant owes the king 10,000 talents (roughly 25 million dollars in today's funds)

The servant cannot pay the king the debt – he is broke

So the king says, sell his wife, sell his kids, sell his house and while you are at it, sell him – the king wanted to maximize whatever he could get in return.

At that point the servant does what any of us would have done – he begs for time to repay

Somehow it touches the king's heart----**out of pity for him** says the text.

And the king does something the man does not even ask for

The king not only releases him, but also forgives the debt – the slate is wiped clean. The servant now owes the king nothing.

As this servant walks away from the king, and leaves the palace,

He spots another servant who owes him some money.

The Bible says it was 100 denarii – about \$10.00

Servant #1 – forgiven great debt servant, grabs servant #2 and says – pay up buster

Vs. 29 is almost a replay of verse 26.

But servant 1 will not forgive this \$10.00 debt and has servant #2 thrown in prison.

The other servants see what has happened and word gets back to the king and soon everyone is talking about it!

The king is furious – he sends his soldiers out and they haul greatly forgiven servant #1 in.

This time there will be no mercy

You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you? (vs32)

The king will not be conned again.

Scripture says the king called for the torturers and handed the man over to them until he should pay back all he owed.

The torturers – every king has them.
They are the ones standing around with icy eyes.
The ones who don't want to antagonize.
The ones who know how to hurt, but no leave marks.

That is the story Jesus tells, but he does not here leave us to wonder about the application does he?

Vs. 35 so my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

In other words, what happened to that man will happen to you unless you learn to forgive and forgive and forgive.

The tormentors will come and take you away and torture you.

Tormentors – not mean looking people in suits who just look as if they can hurt people.
Rather – the hidden tormentors of anger and bitterness that eat your insides out
The tormentors of frustration and malice that give you ulcers and high blood pressure and migraine headaches and lower back pain

The tormentors that make you lie awake at night on
your bed stewing over every rotten thing that
happens to you

The tormentors of an unforgiving heart who stalk
your trail day and night

Who never leave your side

Who suck every bit of joy from your life.

Because we will not forgive from the
heart, this is happening to some of us just as Jesus
said because we refuse to forgive.

I believe there are a number of truths we are meant
to grapple and deal with and in the end we must
accept.

First, the greatness of God's forgiveness. The degree to
which we can appropriate and understand the
depth of God's forgiveness of us first, to that same
degree we will be able to forgive others.

Spend daily time thinking on all those instances and
situations where God's forgiveness of you has been
present

Think of the days in which you have been served
according to God's loving mercies, not your
behaviour

Think on the dark nights through which you have
come

The sins that have been forgiven

The shame unpublished.

Forgiveness is not something that is just generated from within us – it comes as we allow God to touch our lives with His forgiveness first.

Second, think on those things for which you hold tenaciously and in an unforgiving way. I want to say more about this in a moment,

But many of the things which we cannot let go in the cold light of day, are not substantive in the great scope of things

Third, forgiveness is not a complicated and involved act. Actually it is very straight-forward.

Not easy all the time,

Not easy in terms of its unlimitedness.

But sometimes what is needed is action and attitude to forgive or to seek forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a choice we make

It is not a feeling or a mood or a passing notion.

Forgiveness does not mean that we somehow wipe out of our mind the record of what happened

Forgiveness means *that we choose not to remember it*

We can all remember (if we try hard enough) things in the past that have hurt us deeply

Forgiveness means we choose not to hold a grudge against someone who has wronged us

Fourth – the danger of an unforgiving spirit – the tormenters as mentioned moments ago!

In addition to the things mentioned, if you do not forgive, you become a prisoner of your past – you cannot get beyond that one instance or situation leading to the unforgiving mindset.

Aw but Herb, what do you do if the other person will not admit he/she/they were wrong.

How can you forgive in a situation like that? Not easy – been there more than once.

But to practice forgiveness is better than living in the past nursing a wounded spirit.

A wiser person than I said to me at one such time – sometimes Herb you just have to let go of the rope so to speak – the rope and anger and bitterness – and refuse to let the hurt dominate your own life. The relationship may never be healed – (in one of the cases about which I am thinking – it was never healed)

But if you have tried without success, you can choose to step away from the bitterness and no longer dwell on it.

At the time it was given, I refused to heed that piece of counsel and as a result nursed a grudge and hurt for years and certainly much longer than I needed to.

And in terms of reconciliation – no one can force another person to be reconciled.

That must come from a heart prompted by God's Holy Spirit.

Fifth and finally for this morning, the parable must be understood as teaching continual forgiveness – the kind you practice over and over and over again.

And not just with the people we like or are like us

And note the parable was told within the context of a church setting. It's a church person who is ticking Peter off (vs 21)

Touch point for each of us – the practice of forgiveness must begin within the community of the faithful.

If we cannot do it within communities of the faithful, we don't stand a ghost of a chance practicing it beyond these four walls.

I have lived for too long at times and seasons of my life under the burden of remembered hurts and slights.

I expect I am not alone – many of God's people live for years under the burden of remembered hurts

Some of those hurts going back to childhood

Some of them involving people we have not seen for a long time

Some of them close family or friends or work colleagues or school mates.

Forgiveness is God's means of letting go of the past and moving forward with God.

If you have been deeply hurt, nothing will be harder for you than letting go.

But the text leaves us with no other option

But the message of the parable is clear