

Say yes to forgiveness. A sermon preached on September 23, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 51:1-12

II CORINTHIANS 5:14-20

LUKE 7:36-50

One of the truths that we have to accept in this life is that none of us is perfect.

You and I are often found wanting.

Even urban contemplatives must realize this. You and I cannot always count on others to treat us fairly.

Others are not depending upon you and I do always have their best interests at heart either. For you and I live in a world out of joint from God's intent.

Since each of you crawled out of bed each morning, on average, how many people have already crossed your path by this time each day, Consider even this morning...

How many of those people have done something to disappoint you or hurt your feelings?

How many of those who have damaged by your quick tongue or knee-jerk reactions?

We might not even be conscious of how we hurt others.

And we might just let the jabs that come our way roll right off our backs.

Forgiveness for the little scrapes and scratches in our day to day relationships might just happen.

BUT, sometimes any of, each of us can be wounded clear to the core of our being.
You remember that old playground school rhyme –
Sticks and bones may break my bones,
But words will never hurt me...

The original writer of those two lines probably also talked about seeing fairies at the bottom of the garden.

Because words do hurt and often longer and affect future reactions and behavior than sticks and stones.

And as I say this, I can still think of those times of my own childhood and being a young adult where things said, still cause twinges. Such times still haunt me, but not in the same way or with the same power they once did. But they are there and I suspect always will be Times when cruel and cutting things were said about or to me, Times when I said or thought cruel and cutting things about others!

Jesus preached forgiveness a great deal – this morning's Gospel lesson is but one example. Forgiveness is at the centre of the New Testament.

To be an urban contemplative – we must say yes, to forgiveness – there is no plan B.

So, as each of us seek to practice forgiveness – giving and receiving it, accepting it, what truths do we need to keep ever in mind?

The overarching one,

The one that conditions our own ability to both seek and accept forgiveness is FORGIVENESS IS AT THE HEART OF GOD.

The degree to which we can and are able to practice forgiveness in our lives and toward others is dependent upon how clearly, we see God's forgiveness of each of us.

In another setting I might say now – turn to the person next to you and talk about how you have experienced God's forgiveness.

Regular practice of the Examen or lectio divina will open you to see more clearly and how often God's forgiveness of you is more frequent than you might think.

Then as part of your end of the day journaling, ask of the Lord from who do you need to seek forgiveness?

Pray for God's forgiveness and commit to seeking forgiveness sooner rather than later.

Psalms 51 follows one of the tawdry and nasty stories of scripture.

It is prayed by King David following the Prophet Nathan's confrontation of David over the adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the

arranged killing in battle of Bathsheba's husband Uriah.

As David pours out his own heart to God, there is an acknowledgement that yes, David has gone wrong – a great wrong.

But David also lives with the hope that God is a truly forgiving God.

Further that only God can forgive the wrongs of David.

As the David story shows, God does forgive David,

But there is a price for David's wrong isn't there?

And David himself names the price in his reply to Nathan.

You can read this in II Samuel, beginning with chapter 11.

It is little wonder that the historic church still uses many words and phrases from Psalm 51 for public prayers of confession.

God yearns to forgive,

Aches to forgive

And hurries to forgive.

How does the hymn chorus phrase it,

I will arise and go to Jesus,

He will embrace me in His arms

In the arms of my dear Saviour

Oh, there are ten thousand charms

Forgiveness proves that the power of love is stronger than ANYTHING that might separate us from God.

So, the witness of scripture is that *the dominant desire in God's heart is the desire to forgive.*

For it is the Cross upon which Jesus died that is THE expression of God's great desire to forgive.

Ponder on that for a moment!

It was God's love for us that brought Jesus to the Cross.

In the matter of practicing forgiveness, that truth must remain front and centre.

Second truth *forgiveness is extraordinarily complex.*

WHY?

For the prime reason that the situations and circumstances that require its practice are different and often complex.

For example,

Very different situation requiring your seeking and offering forgiveness from a sibling whose favorite toy or video game you have broken ,

Than seeking forgiveness from someone who has raped, beaten and let you for dead.

Very different situation requiring your seeking forgiveness and offering forgiveness for a spouse you have yelled at for leaving mess everywhere than offering forgiveness from a spouse who has been unfaithful, verbally, physically and

psychologically abused you for years until death or divorce.

The situations and circumstances of my own life that still need God's forgiving and healing and restorative help and touch are significant and important to me,

But they do not have layers of things like parental abuse,

Abandonment, family violence, substance abuse, poverty on top that must also be forgiven.

That is,

Forgiveness is no ten easy step programme.

Nor is it responsive to quick and simplistic platitudes.

It is akin to peeling the layers of an onion slowly – lots of tears

Forgiveness takes hard intentional work of soaking prayer and the non-judgmental presence of others over time.

We have to avoid those rationalizing loop holes as well.

- Comparing (it's not as bad as what he or she did)
- Minimizing (it's not so bad really)
- Defending (He, she they, had it coming)
- Justifying (I really had no choice. She or he deserved it)

A third truth is *forgiveness is a profound transaction.*

Why? Because it involves God's forgiveness of each of us first.

There is no other way forgiveness as God, as Jesus, as the Holy Spirit teach it, invite us to practice it aside from God's intimate and personal involvement in our lives.

It is a profound transaction because it runs somewhat against human nature

We open ourselves to the searing and always cleansing light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Often,

We must forgive ourselves first before we seek or offer forgiveness to another.

Sometimes it does hurt that we cannot stand to face the one who stares back at us from the mirror
Sometimes even the efforts of others to help us forgive ourselves are blocked.

In times of unspeakable hurt, loss or disappointment in our lives it IS hard to forgive ourselves isn't it?

We just want to be left alone – lick our wounds as it were.

For a season, this is understandable, but for years not good for us spiritually, psychologically or physically and difficult to horrible to handle by family and friends

I wonder why IS forgiving ourselves so often the hardest thing to do.

I wonder what barriers keep us, keep you, keep me, from loving ourselves as God loves each of us.

A fourth truth in the matter of saying yes to forgiveness is *those who refuse to practice forgiveness will pay a very steep price.*

There is a parable told by Jesus known as the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

It is a parable about a servant who was forgiven a huge and unpayable debt by his landowner.

Subsequently, another servant asked of this first servant some grace to repay a much smaller debt.

He, who had been forgiven much, could not reciprocate or pay it forward to one who was asking to be forgiven a little debt.

Do this parable as a lectio divina – see what you take from it!!!

When the landowner heard this, the first servant (the great debt forgiven servant) was thrown to the “tormentors”

Is that not a very visceral image used by Jesus?

But it is so true.

Spiritually, professionally and personally, I know lack of forgiveness in one’s life does bring on the tormentors

Not to forgive means you do not believe that in God’s strength, change is possible

And so nasty memories of the past continue to overwhelm us in the present

Old and not so old grievances condition how we
live in the present

Lack of forgiveness can so easily morph into
negative and a critical spirit

That is a torment is it not – for who wants to
really be around for any length of time – people
who are driven by negative energy or have a critical
spirit?

Not to forgive is to yield oneself to another's
control, to become part of another's nightmare.
How often in this situation of unforgiveness does
one become locked into a sequence of act and
response, of outrage and revenge – always
devolving. Because payback is never equal – it is
always a little more – yes.

Forgiveness frees the forgiver...

It is not easy – the practice of offering and
accepting forgiveness

It never has been.

If it had been Jesus and the rest of the scriptures
would not have given it so much air time>

Difficult or not, it must be practiced, if the words
from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians are not
just talk!

The Examen, lectio divina and some of the
other basic practices of being an urban
contemplative we will examine in the weeks to
come remain ways, tools to get a handle of this
heart of God truth called FORGIVENESS.

But all of these helps, tools, methods – call them what you wish

All the books, testimonies, personal experiences of the healing power of God's forgiveness will be so much dust UNLESS each of us as individuals says ENOUGH!

Lord, help me say yes to the practice of forgiveness in my daily life.

Help me see signs of your forgiveness in my life,
Help me to forgive myself, as I seek to offer and accept the forgiveness – your forgiveness – of others.