

***Matthew 18:21-35***

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘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?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

## **Sermon – Sunday, September 13, 2020 – Forgiveness – St James**

Forgiveness! Jesus says to Peter – forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven! In other words, forgive freely, without counting, on and on and on.

Why? Because we are a forgiven people — a people generously and lavishly forgiven by God. We are actually just like the first slave in the Gospel whose huge debt his master forgave. If we are honest, we know how far we fall short and how much we have been forgiven. In light of the abundant grace in which we stand, what possible response can we have, but to pay the wealth of God’s forgiveness forward?

But first a little story. A couple who had been married for 25 years began having disagreements. They didn’t like that this was happening and agreed on an idea the wife had. For one month they would each drop slips in a “Fault” box each had for the other. The boxes would provide a place to let the other know about daily irritations. The wife was diligent in her efforts: she wrote “leaving the top off the jam jar,” “wet towels on the bathroom floor,” “dirty socks not in the hamper,” on and on until the end of the month. After dinner, at the end of the month, they exchanged boxes. The husband read out loud and silently reflected on what he had done wrong. Then the wife opened her box and began reading. They were all the same, the message on each slip read, “I love you!”

Was the woman perfect? Was she without fault? No! Of course not! But the husband somehow overlooked his wife’s faults and to forgave them, which freed him to love her.

We are challenged every day of our lives to forgive the many hurts and irritations which occur as part of daily life. These may be the hardest to forgive because they are so familiar, so in our face and ongoing. To keep on forgiving the critical spouse, the intrusive family member, the thoughtless fellow worker, the self centred friend, the angry teacher—how can we do it?

In our Lord’s last moments on the cross, he said, “Forgive them”—all of them, the Roman soldiers, the religious leaders, his own disciples who had deserted him, you, me—forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” No, forgiveness was not easy for Jesus.

On the old Phil Donahue show about a year after the L.A. riots, Reginald Denny was Phil's guest. Denny was a truck driver who had been beaten by four young men during that riot.

Donahue asked Denny how he felt towards those who had attacked him. When Reginald Denny said that he had forgiven them, the crowd booed loudly and long... Why? Is it... because forgiveness is not easy and so it's not popular?

Deep hurt leaves deep scars. Forgiveness is hard, especially in long term relationships with friends, family or co-workers that have been plagued for years with troubles.

Forgiveness would be easy if it didn't hurt so much, especially when it must be extended to someone whom we feel doesn't deserve it, who hasn't earned it, who hasn't admitted their own fault, who may misuse the forgiveness we give. Forgiveness rubs against the grain.

Forgiveness costs, especially when it means accepting the wrong; when it means reaching out in God's love instead of waiting for the other person to reach out first.

*On October 2, 2006 a tragedy occurred in Lancaster, County. Charles C. Roberts walked into an Amish schoolhouse armed with three guns, shot 10 young girls, killing five of them and himself. In a suicide note to his wife, Charles claimed that he had taken the lives of innocent children for something that happened in his past. The couple's first child had died in 1997, just 20 minutes after she was born three months prematurely. "In some way he felt like he was getting back to the Lord for the loss that we had sustained," said Charles' wife in an interview.*

*Although Charles had committed this heinous crime, the Amish community and the loved ones of the deceased demonstrated forgiveness. They attended Charles's funeral and comforted the widow. The mother of Charles recalls a powerful moment at her son's funeral: "For the mother and father who had lost not just one but two daughters at the hand of our son, to come up and be the first ones to greet us — wow. Is there anything in this life that we should not forgive?"*

In her popular memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott writes that withholding forgiveness is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die. Which one of us wants to be filled with poison when it's meant for another.

Nora Gallagher writes, "Forgiveness is a way to unburden oneself from the constant pressure of rewriting the past."

Forgiveness is needed on a big scale these days as it has always been. There is Systemic racism, open and hidden prejudice ...for example, people of colour and indigenous people are oppressed and die.

Lutheran minister Nadia Bolz-Weber describes mistreatment as a chain that binds us. She writes this about the power of forgiveness to free us for the work of justice and transformation.

*"So what if forgiveness, rather than being a ... way to say, 'It's okay,' is actually a way of wielding bolt-cutters, and snapping the chains that link us? What if it's saying, 'What you did was so **not** okay, I refuse to be connected to it anymore.'? Forgiveness is about being a freedom fighter....Free people aren't controlled by the past.... Free people are unafraid to speak truth.... Free people are not chained to resentments. And that's worth fighting for."*

I like the image of forgiveness being bolt-cutters – snapping through the chains that bind us and free us to stand up for what is just.

Henri Nouwen writes, "Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly, and so we need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly. Forgiveness is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family."

I think Nouwen's words are worth repeating: **The hard truth is that all people love poorly.** And so forgiveness is our way of coping with our weakness...our inability to love well.

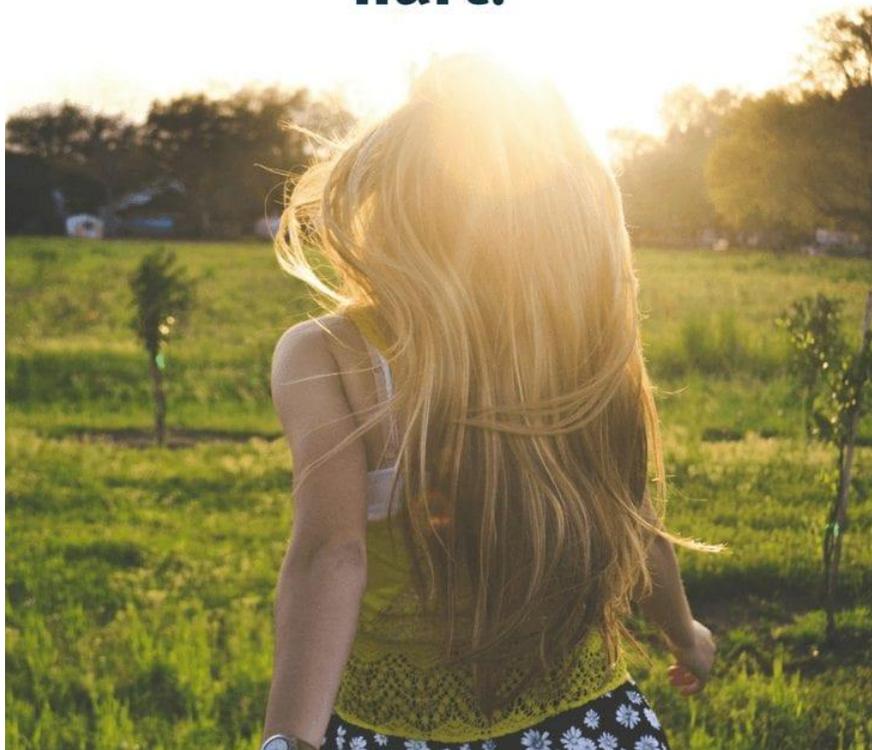
May we take up the hard work of forgiveness for the sake of a broken and desperate world. It is the most important work we can do as the children of a God who grieves and rages against oppression, pain and suffering. May we cut the chains that bind us. May we rise. And may we always champion the healing grace and forgiveness of God, until justice reigns. Amen.

God's grace and forgiveness, while free to the recipient, are always costly for the giver. From the earliest parts of the Bible, it was understood that God could not forgive without sacrifice. No one who is seriously wronged can “just forgive” the perpetrator.

Timothy Keller

## REMINDER

**Forgiveness is a process. A choice you have to make over and over, every day, until you're free of hurt.**



And that is perhaps why our Lord says we must forgive not only seven times, but seventy times seven.

This is the story of a woman who finds out her husband has died in a train wreck. She reacts with sadness at first, but then realizes in a rush of emotion & relief that she is "Free! Body and soul free!" She views the world with a fresh outlook--one where she will be her own person, answering only to herself. She is ready to begin this new life when her husband--who evidently wasn't on the train after all--comes home. The woman (Louise) dies from heart failure on the spot.

## ***There are different kinds of forgiveness***

Decisional forgiveness is a sincere decision to change the way you intend to behave toward someone who has wronged <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>you, even though you may still feel negatively toward the person. Emotional forgiveness is a change in the way you feel toward this person—resentment giving way to positive emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, and even love.

If forgiveness is not denial, or a shortcut, or a reconciliation, or an easy process, then what is it? What exactly is Jesus asking of us when he tells us to forgive each other again and again and again and again?

It costs to forgive. We have to let go of our outrage at the injustice. Forgiveness is about acceptance, acceptance of others as they really are; its about acceptance of the problematic situation. Perhaps the person shouldn't be the way they are, but we come to accept that that **is** the way they are for now and although it is not **all** they are...there **are** still good things about that person. Perhaps a situation is not as it should be, but that is the way it is, for now.

Real forgiveness doesn't mean that we don't feel hurt. It doesn't mean that we won't think about it once in a while. It doesn't mean we won't have a set back and feel angry and want revenge. It doesn't mean that we have to be their best buddy. It doesn't mean we will allow them to do it again either. It doesn't mean the pain will go away over night after we forgive.

What it does mean, how forgiveness happens is by saying to our Lord "I forgive them." And I forgive them because I have hurt you Lord, more than they could ever hurt me and you forgave me. We can make a definite decision to forgive. We need to have a sincere desire to forgive. The time to start forgiving is now. It is time to start. We can ask God for his grace to enable us to forgive. We can ask to be filled with the spirit which will erase the hurt and heal us. Erasers remind us of what is erased for us and in turn how we can erase the mistakes of others. We ask for the spirit to enable us to accept what is and to work with it