

Travelling Light: forgiveness

Reconnect – January 24, 2010

Text: Ephesians 4:30-32; Luke 6:35-38

Key Thought: The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is forgiving: responding to wrongs with the grace that He gives us.

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behaviour. Instead be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Pre-Intro: clip from The Good Wife, S01E04

Intro: Uniquely Canadian

- **Quiz:** If someone bumps into a Canadian in the grocery store, the Canadian says...
 - a) **Hey! What are you doing?**
 - b) **Watch it, bub!**
 - c) **Sorry!**
 - d) **Get out of my way!**
- From what I hear from people, it's uniquely Canadian – “the pre-emptive apology”
- The other person is in the wrong – they've done YOU wrong – it's their fault – you haven't done anything wrong at all – it's ALL them – but the first thing out of your mouth is still “I'm sorry”
- I guess that's just the way we are – the mild mannered citizens of Earth – offering forgiveness to those who are engaged in stepping on us in order to get to the Grocery Deal of the Week
- What's interesting, if you're one of those people, (and I'd like to think that I am) is encountering someone who ISN'T – someone who doesn't apologize in response to your “pre-emptive apology” – either they go on their way in silence, or they mutter something at you, or worse
- Suddenly you AREN'T mild-mannered anymore – suddenly you're MAD – how DARE they not feel the power of your pre-emptive apology? Turds...
- Maybe we're not as nice and forgiving as we'd like to think

Q: Forgiveness: what do YOU think of when you hear that word?

Q: Imagine for a moment that there was no such thing as forgiveness. What would our world be like?

- The basic apology – the simple core of forgiveness at work
- I wrong you – I apologize – instead of getting revenge on me, you accept my apology and no longer hold what I did against you
- It's what makes all of our relationships work – the oil that keeps them going, keeps them from seizing up or destroying themselves
- Without forgiveness we have grudges, revenge, mistrust, isolation, stress, health problems, emotional instability, even paranoia – every part of us breaks down – we are completely disconnected from others, even God – because if there is no such thing as forgiveness, then there is no way that we could ever get near a perfect, holy, pure God
- Is it any wonder, then, that the Bible has so much to say about forgiveness? And why Paul, in the section we already read this morning, is so intent to make sure that it's practised in his churches?

Read Text: Ephesians 4:30-32

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behaviour. Instead be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Kinds of forgiveness:

- I spent a lot of time thinking and reading about forgiveness this week – there's a lot out there
- Like, did you know that there are different kinds of forgiveness?
- There's **reciprocal forgiveness** – the kind we talked about at the start – the “I apologize” kind – someone wrongs us, then comes to us, apologizes, we think about it, and then offer them forgiveness, and many times, reconciliation
 - This is the kind we use most often in our families, with our closest friends, people we see every day – it's what keeps us going and keeps the little things from breaking us down
- And then there's another kind of forgiveness, which some people call **unilateral forgiveness** – the kind where you forgive someone even if they're not sorry for what they've done, or it would be impossible to even speak with them, for them to ask your forgiveness – an attacker, a parent who has passed away, that sort of thing
 - This is the kind that people do to set themselves free – instead of being trapped by unforgiveness, instead of being trapped by their own hurts
 - Debbie Ford: “Unforgiveness is the poison you drink every day hoping the other person will die”
 - Lewis B. Smedes: “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover that the prisoner was you”
- There's also a third kind – the kind where **we forgive ourselves** what WE'VE done – the mistakes we've made, the people we've hurt, our regrets – most of the time, this is really easy – but we've all screwed up at one point or another

But how do you forgive?

- It's easy to talk about forgiveness, and much harder to get it right
- In our politically correct world, there is a lot of pressure to forgive, whether reciprocal or unilateral – but probably more pressure for the unilateral side – it's the “noble response”
- And the more people are conditioned to forgive ONLY for the benefits it brings the person doing the forgiving, I think the more often people wind up lost at it, or faking it, or even just feeling like they're faking it when it comes to forgiveness
- We hear the noble stories of those who endured great suffering and forgave their tormentors, and we want to be in that category but aren't sure how to get there – because forgiveness, among other things, is VERY HARD
- Where does the strength come from? The will? The determination? Is it only that it's good for us?

God on forgiveness

- The best place to learn about forgiveness is to go to the person who came up with the idea – God – who has built this reflex into us
- What does He do with forgiveness? He forgives more than anyone else – and from people who are the worst of the worst – how does He do it?
- There’s a clue in the section we read, where Paul says, “be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” – it’s that word “forgive”
- In the original Greek, it’s not the word for “forgive” that you’d think – instead, it’s a word that has a variety of translations – it’s *charizomenoi* – to deal graciously with someone, to be “grace-filled”(first part is “Karis”)

Grace needed:

- You can’t skip grace and expect to be able to forgive someone – you’ll carry a grudge for sure, or be faking it, or have it keep coming back again and again and again
- And in order for us to be “grace-filled” with others, we need God’s grace at work in our own lives – changing us from the inside out
- It’s like a giant fan moving the air around in the house of our life – circulating, purifying – sometimes you might not think it’s getting through, but it is – flushing out the grudges, the hurts, the embarrassments, the pain – and once we’re changed, then we just have to carry it along – it’s natural for us to do it in that
- We need the grace of God to get “unilateral forgiveness” or “reciprocal forgiveness” right – we need God in us, working through us, so that we can extend our hand whether it will ever be taken or not – and we can only truly do that by God’s grace to us, ourselves
- We forgive the ones we love, because we love them enough to “take a hit” on their behalf
- We forgive the ones we don’t love, because we don’t want to carry the load of NOT forgiving them
- But most of all, with God’s grace in our life, we forgive because of what He has done for us
- Grace even lets us let things go that may or may NOT be wrongs done against us – we all know someone who interprets the entire world as an action against themselves – but it’s like Teflon – it keeps what the world throws at us from sticking to us
- Offering grace is what God does, to people who don’t know Him, to people who aren’t sorry for what they do, to people who refuse to acknowledge Him – every moment of every day

Grace spurned:

- **The new way: never apologize**, and if you do, make it general and third-person or even misdirected – apologize without admitting you were ever wrong: “mistakes were made” – “I’m sorry that you feel that way” – “I’d like to apologize on their behalf” – “let’s move forward” – “blame is not what is needed here”
- It’s hard to forgive people who don’t take personal responsibility for their actions – and really, forgiving doesn’t mean that they aren’t held to their actions by God – he will bring them to the point where they see the hurt they’ve done
- It’s maybe just as hard to forgive people who continue to make the same mistakes, to do the same things that hurt us – because we feel like we’re trapped in a cycle that doesn’t end

Q: Think about a person you’ve had a hard time forgiving – the struggle you’ve had

Q: Think about the last person you forgave: why did you do it?

- **III. Forgiveness is like shovelling your driveway in the winter**
- Remember the winter a couple of years ago when we got all that snow? Our snowbanks were nine feet high plus in the front of our house – it got so that you had to push the snow higher than you had to push it to get it to your lawn
- Forgiving someone who has really hurt us is like shovelling snow – first, it’s a lot of work to clear the driveway, especially if the “snow” has really built up over time – the plow comes, you have multiple snowfalls – every shovel full is hard
- Sometimes forgiving someone is easier – it’s just a dusting of snow on your driveway – you get out and deal with it, keep your driveway clear, it’s all good – the best way to live, travelling light
- Once you have the snow off the driveway, you have piled up snowbanks – and you have to make sure that they don’t fall back onto the driveway – bitterness, grudges, old habits – sometimes they do, and you have to shovel again
- But ultimately, the snow melts – and so does what we have to forgive, when we pile it up and quit digging through it again and again
- And one day when we think about it, we realize that much of our hurt feelings and experiences have faded, by the grace of God – they have melted away
- On the other hand, if we refuse to forgive, it just piles up and piles up and hurts us – and if we keep digging through it, again and again, going back over the same stuff, ultimately we just make more work for ourselves

When have I had to forgive?

- Planting the church
- Growing up (mom)
- Friends that haven’t been – when I was kicked out of Bible College
- My wife – forgiveness in the context of marriage – how can you not forgive “yourself”?
- Myself – regrets, mistakes, things I’ve done

Key Thought:

The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is forgiving: responding to wrongs with the grace that He gives us.

[Jesus said,] “Love your enemies! Do good to them! ... Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for He is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven. If you give, you will receive.” (Luke 6:35-38)

- If we don't forgive, we are carrying the weight of the things that have been done to us – the people who have wronged us – and that's too much for any of us to handle and still have a good life

How to forgive?

- 1) **Be forgiven yourself – experience the grace of God in your own life**
- 2) **Choose to forgive, and then do it – a person, something you've been carrying**
- 3) **See #2 as often as necessary**

Conclusion – we can truly forgive because God has shown us how

- III. – Martin Luther King Jr. – MLK day this past week in the USA – forgiving your enemies – in the spirit of Jesus – he kept a movement non-violent, and that was his perhaps his greatest achievement – when so many others advocated violence as a way forward, he consistently rejected it AND forgave his oppressors and opponents again and again
- He wasn't perfect – but he had learned to forgive through the grace of God, through the example of Jesus that he read about in the Bible – and he taught others to forgive, to forbear, to endure, using the strength they gained from their connection with Jesus
- It's that same strength – the same strength of God that raised Jesus from the dead, that has allowed people through the centuries to forgive those who have harmed them, that is available for you and I
- But it starts with us asking for God's forgiveness – without it, we have good wishes, good intentions, strength of will – but with God's forgiveness, we have a foundation that can't be shaken in our lives
- When we come to Him with all our junk, and experience His love as He takes it away – we're changed forever, and we can't help but offer that same grace to those around us
- Maybe you know there's someone you need to forgive, and you're not sure how to start – I recommend First John 1:9: “If we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong” (NLT)
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Q: Is there a person that you need to forgive? Or that you need to take another step towards forgiving?

Q: What's getting in the way of that?

Q: Is there something between you and God, that needs to be taken care of?

[play Matt Redman song This Is How We Know]

Response: Q & A

- 1) Q: What is the cost of unforgiveness?
- 2) Q: What would you say is “unforgivable”?
- 3)