



Forgive Each Other Heritage Day

Matthew 18:21–35

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,
“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my
brother or sister who sins against me?
Up to seven times?” Jesus answered,
“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy
times seven times.*

September 17, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scriptures: Romans 14:7-9, Matthew 18:21-35

Recently we read of a terrible explosion that took place in the city of Kabul, Afghanistan. Eighty civilians were killed; many hundreds were injured in the attack by ISIS forces. On the same page that told of this destructive blast there appeared another story titled “US Drops Mother of All Bombs on ISIS caves in Afghanistan.” No information regarding deaths or injuries. (It seems interesting that this instrument of death and destruction could be given the military designation “mother.” Mothers give life, not death. I wanted to cite these two incidents, by the way, because they are not isolated in today’s world of war.

Aside from the daily military encounters, of course, we hear almost daily of violent encounters between individuals or groups who seek to even the score over some personal affront or injury. Such clashes have been occurring since Cain and Abel first came to blows over God’s favor, flocks or crops?

Fundamentally, what most of these encounters are concerned with is retribution, retaliation for an offense already done. One side strikes back against another over some offense, real or imagined. I realize, of course, in today’s world of warfare it is often difficult to determine who might be cited as the guilty party and who the aggrieved. Nonetheless, the fundamental reason given for the attack is that an offense (seeming or real) is cited as the cause for retribution. So, the battles continue to go on as they probably have since the beginning of human history.

Aside from the military or personal battles that we read about each day, we also realize that the inclination for retaliation lays deep in each our hearts and minds. We feel a certain pride of self in our achievements. Moreover, we seem to guard all that, very ferociously in our encounters with others. When we feel offended there is a swift yearning to take revenge.

Of course, there is always the nagging question that remains when we seek reprisal: what has been achieved? Are we any better served even if we believe that we have won the battle? Is our little world any the better for it? We may indeed feel that this battle has gone our way but ultimately the war in our conscience continues to disturb us.

All this is at the heart of the theme of our scriptures for this Sunday. The writer makes it clear that wrath and anger are hateful things but we still hang on to them for dear life. The vengeful will suffer the Lord’s vengeance for He remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor’s injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.

Jesus, addressing the question of forgiveness in Matthew’s gospel, responds to a question of mathematics and forgiveness: The questioner asks: “How many times must I forgive my neighbor, even seven times?” “No,” Jesus responds, “not even seven times seven but seventy times seven times.” (490 times!) In other words in Jewish idiom, seven is the infinite number;

there is no end to the number of times one must forgive. At the end of Jesus' story, he draws a line in the sand: "My Father will treat you in exactly the same way unless each of you forgives his brother (sister) from the heart."

Putting all that in modern psychological terms we are asked to consider forgiveness a "heartfelt" emotion, something that is deeply engrained in our conscience, a habit that will work for us seventy times seven, twenty-four-seven.

Now, lest I end up being told that I'm preaching to the choir, let me say that I've probably been working on that seventy-times-seven rule for a lot of years, but it never seems to get any easier. Of course, Jesus never did say that it would...right?

Happy Birthday

Laurie (9/18), Kim (9/20) & Ed (9/21)

Forgive Each Other Discussion

Forgiving others may seem to be a choice, and in one sense it is a choice, but God has been very clear about forgiveness. He has given us specific direction in numerous Scriptures, all of which can be summed up in just one word -- forgive! God's Word says, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25). "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).

God is saying that it is in *our* own best interest to forgive! He is not talking about what is in the best interest of the person who needs to be forgiven. We are the ones who God is trying to protect. We are the ones who receive the most benefit from forgiveness, not the other person. A spirit of un-forgiveness complicates and compromises our daily walk with God. Forgiving others releases us from anger and allows us to receive the healing we need. The whole reason God has given us specific direction is because He does not want anything to stand between Him and us. God's love for us is beyond our comprehension. Forgiving others *saves us* from the consequences of living out of an unforgiving heart.

Forgiving others often starts as a decision of surrender-an act of our will. This surrender invites God to begin working in our lives in a deeper level, allowing God to heal us. We can ask God to enlighten us with the understanding that we need to fully forgive from our hearts. We simply need to make the choice to be open to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Remember, forgiveness does not justify the deed or the person, it does not provide God's forgiveness for their actions, because only God can do that. While nothing can undo the past, we can do something about the condition of our own present and future. Forgiving others makes a way for our own healing to begin.