

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Forgiving One Another

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 18:21-35 (NRSVUE)

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ 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.' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ 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. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 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."

Bible/Sermon Focus

Our scripture today is a continuation of Jesus' description of how conflict and forgiveness should work in the Kingdom of God. Verses 15 – 17 say, "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector."

Our scripture for today begins with verse 21 where Peter is asking a clarifying question, "How often should I forgive?" And Jesus' response is basically, "All the time."

Jesus never promises there will not be conflict. In fact, we should expect conflict. Jesus isn't laying this out for *if* we have issues between us. He's laying it out for *when* we have issues between us. Being in community in the reign of God is still being in community, and that is never free from conflict.

Community implies an interconnectedness, that we are linked together somehow and that our fates and our treatment of each other effect and affect the whole of us. And the need for

forgiveness implies that harm has been done to some member or members of the community. Trauma, harm, and arguments leave scars and wounds and messy patches between us.

Nadia Bolz-Weber says it like this, "I really believe that, when someone else does us harm, we're connected to that mistreatment like a chain. Because forgiveness is nothing less than an act of fidelity to an evil-combating campaign. So, it's not an act of niceness, it's not being a doormat. It really, to me, is more bad-ass than that. Maybe retaliation or holding on to anger about the harm done to me doesn't actually combat evil. Maybe it feeds it. Because in the end, if we're not careful, we can actually absorb the worst of our enemy and, on some level, even start to become them. So what if forgiveness, rather than being like a pansy way of saying, 'It's okay,' is actually a way of wielding bolt cutters and snapping the chain that links us. Like it is saying, 'What you did was so not okay that I refuse to be connected to it anymore.' Forgiveness is about being a freedom fighter."

Ask we live together in community, with our aim being the Reign of God on Earth, forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, and redemption are all necessary for us to get free, and to help each other get free. Our freedom is wrapped up in one another's freedom and we will need to practice forgiveness if we are serious about making a difference for Christ for the transformation of the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you seen a Christian community practice the formula for conflict as modeled in Matthew 18:15-17?
2. Reflect on this quote from Bolz-Weber, "Maybe retaliation or holding on to anger about the harm done to me doesn't actually combat evil. Maybe it feeds it."
3. "...forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." What does this actually mean?
4. How does forgiving someone build the Reign of God on Earth?
5. What's the difference between forgiving someone and condoning their behavior?

Prayer

God of Forgiveness, teach us to *really* practice forgiveness. Remind us of your Word when confronting each other. Remind us that reconciliation is worth confrontation. Give us a glimpse of your reign here on Earth as we practice honesty and forgiveness with one another. **Amen.**

"Our deepest, most painful wounds not only leave us with scars that we bear forever, but also, if we make our peace with them, leave us wiser, stronger, more sensitive than we otherwise would have been had we not been afflicted with them." -Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems