



It's Really About Forgiveness



A Sermon By
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October 2, 2016

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at:
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2016-10-02-RDM.mp4a.m4a>.

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Luke 17:5-10

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The Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost
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The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

Luke 16:19-21

In 2005 my son was shot dead by a young man names Jamar "Crown" Jones. Jamar was a young man with several gun charges and crimes committed around Buffalo but had never killed anyone. He was a father of a daughter who at the time I believe was around four-years-old. He seemed to be headed to a life of crime and mayhem in the community. When I received word that my son had been shot and died shortly thereafter, I heard God's voice say to me "You don't want justice you want peace!" So I quickly formed a newspaper announcement notifying the community of my son's death that began Courtney Dion Meadows, "Our Friend Lives! We do not want Justice we want peace!" To insure that the peace was authentic or what I felt was God's peace I penned a letter to Jamar telling him I forgave him for killing my son. This killing was the most difficult time I've ever experienced and I had to come through it whole, intact, with my mind in one piece. The peace I speak of this morning is the Peace that comes in the midst of storms or in the midst of the tough times. No matter what, you must seek it. So, it is in seeking peace, we discover forgiveness plays an important role in the life of the believer in Christ.

The expectation is when we have been offended we must find a way to forgive as difficult as it may be, we must forgive.

Every so often the writers of the Lectionary leave us hanging. They bring us into the lesson without the information that truly enlightens the text. The Lectionary Gospel begins at verse five. They bring us into this text almost in mid-stream. It begins with the Apostles saying, "Lord increase our faith!"

The story does not begin there, it begins with verses 1-5, Jesus telling the twelve:

¹ "Offenses are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. ² It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. ³ So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴ Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

Somewhere between the books of Genesis and Amos, three times for forgiveness seemed to be the limit, however Jesus introduces into the equation of offense and forgiveness a new formula. (see Genesis 4:24) For the Apostles he says that if you are offended then you must be prepared to forgive a person up to seven times. Yes, if they offend you and come back seven times, repenting you must forgive them. Peter in the synoptic version says, "Jesus, You mean if someone offends me seven times, I must forgive them? Seven times?" It's almost as if Jesus said "Peter, for you seventy times seven!" (Matthew 18:22) Four hundred and ninety times! This is where the text picks up this morning.

Can you hear the apostle's voices? "You must be crazy!" "You can forgive seven times, but not me!" "He (Jesus) must have lost his mind!" My Episcopal mother when I'd act up in church would Father, Son and Holy Ghost me, look down the pew and say, "have you lost your ever loving mind?" Actually they mean in order for me to forgive that many times, Jesus you need to "Increase our faith!"

The relevant question this morning has to be, what do I do when I'm offended? When someone hurts me, what do I do? When someone tries to abuse me, assault me, bully me, steal from me, take my sanity, shame me, rob me of my dignity, what do I do?

Jesus is clear in his instructions to the apostles: in order to do this according to the Good News, the Evangelion in the Greek, you must find a way to forgive the offender. 7x7 or 70x7, yes 490 times. The offender has to be careful because they are in danger; that is God's part. Psalm 37:8 and 9 gives us the outline. But for the believer, the disciple, the one who follows Jesus it is different.

1. Know that forgiveness is older than the cross. Jesus is clear Luke 6:36 36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. 37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: 38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; (and not just money) good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. Forgiveness begins at creation if in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and it was dwelt among us full of truth and Grace. If God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have ever lasting life.

2. Know it is your reasonable service. Jesus says to the 12, ⁷ “Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? ⁸ Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? ⁹ Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” If he is the lover of our souls, don't we owe reasonable service? If he is the lifter of our heads when we have been offended, don't we owe reasonable service? If he has forgiven all my sins, blotted out all my iniquity, don't we owe reasonable service? (Romans 12:1) I beseech you therefore, brethren (and sisters), by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

When your hearts are broken, when you are feeling low, when the world has the inimitable gall to hurt you...forgive, for it is your reasonable service.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I thank you for Grace. I thank you for this moment in time, and as hard as it may be and as difficult as it may be, give us the power to forgive. Especially the ones closest to us. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.