

A New Way of Walking with Others (Matthew 6:14-15; 22:39)

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/a-new-way-of-walking-with-others

Our scriptures for this morning's message are Matt: 6:14-15 and 22:39:

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

39 And the second (commandment) is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

You may be familiar with both of these scriptures. The first is part of the Lord's Prayer. The second is part of Jesus' succinct summary of the Ten Commandments condensed into two commandments, the second being: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We pray the Lord's Prayer usually from memory because of our familiarity with the passage.

9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. 14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

To put this scripture in context, the Lord's prayer is part of a section of the Gospels known as the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus lays out his teachings on Kingdom living.

Jesus offers the Lord's Prayer for daily use. It's purpose: To invite God to put his stamp on your day.

Verses 9 and 10, parallel the first commandment according to Jesus which is to put God first in your life - relationship with God comes first. Verses 11 through 15 also parallel Jesus' commandments, the second part of which is to love your neighbor as yourself. Along with the very practical request for physical needs - daily bread - the prayer teaches us to ask forgiveness. But it doesn't stop there: we are expected to **give** forgiveness, too.

How easy for us to gloss over this part even though it's the continuation of one thought: "... *as we also have forgiven our debtors!*" We ask forgiveness as we forgive others. It's not two separate things. It's not just that I personally need to be forgiven. Others need forgiveness, too. And not just from God - forgiveness at least in MY kingdom, starts with me forgiving others.

This morning I want to suggest that in this part of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is initiating A NEW WAY OF WALKING WITH OTHERS built on forgiveness.

The Old Testament reminds us Jesus' way of walking with others is truly radical. The first 11 chapters of Genesis describe how far and how quickly unrepentant humans fell after the garden. Divisions between people at every level of human relationships reached such a violent pitch, the admonition "an eye for an eye," was a vast improvement for ratcheting down the vindication and vengeance that ruled the day. If a man offended another, the offended party might take that other man's life for that offense, and

proceed to take vengeance on the man's entire household, wiping away the memory of his family's name from the face of the earth. Stories of genocide abound in the pages of the Old Testament.

In that context, Jesus invites us not only to pray forgiveness for others, but invites us to walk with them in forgiveness as well. Jesus describes this when he says, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."* Matt. 5:37-39 NIV

You see, sin and the offenses that require forgiveness act like ripples through water. When the water is disturbed, it's not disturbed once, and then peace returns. No. Ripples radiate out replicating the disturbance across the surface until it finally comes up against something that stops it.

Waves are giant ripples. When you think of the destructive power of waves - the ultimate wave, a tsunami - it's frightening to consider. I saw a movie not long ago that was about the devastation wreaked upon a sleepy Malaysian resort by a surprise tsunami. Unfettered, our collective sins can create tsunamis wreaking havoc on us and every level of relationships in our lives. Marriage relationships. Families. Friendships. Churches. Neighborhoods. Yes, even nations. It takes something powerful that taps into the divine to counter such a destructive force. In relationship terms, that power is unleashed through forgiveness.

"During the Rwandan genocide in the mid nineties, the entire family of a woman named Immaculee Ilibagiza was murdered in a massacre. Immaculee chose to forgive the people behind the death of her family and went on to write a best selling book entitled "Left to Tell." She founded the Left to Tell Charitable Fund in order to help children who have been orphaned due to genocide. Rwanda's history was marred by tragic cultural genocide, yet decades later, healing and reconciliation have begun throughout the country. This is an incredible reminder of the power of forgiveness to heal not only individuals, but communities." (From 5 INSPIRATIONAL STORIES OF FORGIVENESS YOU WON'T FORGET)

With forgiveness, Jesus gives us a tool **for calming the ripples and repairing the damage from the destructive waves of our sin and the sins of those around us**. Through forgiveness, we can hold onto relationships and even whole communities if we freely and daily offer forgiveness.

Let me state it this way: In the Lord's Prayer, **Jesus tells us to make space in our day, every day for forgiveness**. You want to experience the peace that passes understanding? Make space for forgiveness in your day. You want to help usher in the kingdom? Make space for forgiveness in your day.

I must confess, there are spaces in my day when I tend to be less forgiving of those around me. Ever been in traffic and been totally offended by the driving habits of those around you? Maybe that's a space in my life where I need to make room for forgiveness. Ever get online and see a post, or receive an email, and feel totally offended by what is said? Maybe that's a space in your life where you need to make more room for forgiveness.

But you say, how many times do I have to forgive others? Peter asked that question. *"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-seven times."* Matt. 18:20-22 NIV

Make LOTS of space for forgiveness in your life.

Forgiveness is not about being right or wrong, either. It's not a zero sum game. Forgiveness is about wholeness and love and community and relationship. Forgiveness makes room for ambiguity in relationships. And God makes it a supreme priority. Read again Matthew 6:14-15: *"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*

The focus is not just on receiving forgiveness, it's on giving forgiveness. Sometimes we need forgiveness because we are just wrong. Sometimes we need to give forgiveness because we've been wronged. Forgive.

Sometimes we need forgiveness because we are not quite right in the way we treat others. Sometimes we need to forgive because others treat us not quite right. Times when we say things that we're sorry we said or we do things or behave in ways that offend someone. We don't break one of the ten commandments but we do hurt a relationship. That requires forgiveness for healing to happen.

Sometimes we need forgiveness even when we ARE right. Sometimes we need to forgive others even when we believe we are IN the right. When I speak of right I mean that we believe we are right and that what we believe is true. Ideas, political ideologies, cultural views; these may all seem right to us but seem quite wrong to someone else. What do you do when that "someone else" is a family member or our neighbor? Forgiveness holds the key. Remember it's not a zero sum game. But our society pushes the idea that there are only winners and losers. God's kingdom runs by a different set of rules.

No one deserves forgiveness. The Bible is full of examples of people God forgives, of acts of forgiveness that seem so impossible, so undeserved. Joseph forgives his brothers who left him to die out in the elements to be eaten by predators. Rescued by traders, he was sold into slavery. Hosea, the Bible tells us, describes a Godly man who forgives his wife's gross infidelity, and provides a picture of God's overwhelming Grace to us. Jesus reminds us of the story of a father's unconditional love for a prodigal son. Over and over again, we see forgiveness is the key to relationships saved, restored, renewed; that forgiveness is something only God can truly give, but - and here's the miracle - He gives THROUGH us when we offer forgiveness to others.

Relationships are unsustainable without forgiveness. With forgiveness, we don't have to choose winners and losers every time. Forgiveness holds the key. Through forgiveness we can remain in fellowship, hold our beliefs, and stay in relationships with our neighbors and in our community.

The 13th century Persian poet Rumi said: "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

Carol Braverman teaches in a private high school in New England. In one of her classes, she had a student named Liza (Sounds like Leeza). On the first day of class, when she called her name, she pronounced it Lisa. Liza politely corrected her pronunciation. The next day it happened again. "Lisa?" she called. "Liza," she corrected, "with a Z." Braverman apologized. But despite the simplicity of the name, Braverman could not get it right. She would call out, "Lisa," then immediately correct herself. The class began to call her "Lisa/Liza." Despite the good natured vibes to the joke, Braverman worried that Liza would think she was deliberately mocking her. In spite of all this, the mistake persisted. Braverman couldn't shake it and said she came to dread the roll call. So it continued with Lisa/Liza every day in class, until one day Braverman saw her student, walking alone on campus and caught up with her.

“Lisa,” She said, then immediately stopped, distressed and beyond apology. At that point, Liza flung her arms around Braverman in a hug. “Ms. B,” she said, “it doesn’t matter. Really. It’s fine. You can call me Lisa. Don’t worry about it.”

Braverman said, “From that moment on, I never got her name wrong again. Not once. It was as if the girl’s forgiveness had released me from some enchantment, like in a fairy tale. In the annals of the world’s giant wrongs, this is a small story, and a minor miracle at best. But I never forgot it, and the generosity at its heart has informed many moments since.”

Forgiveness doesn’t work unless it is delivered in love, agape love. And none of it really holds together except in the context of the resurrection. Seated in God’s great love and resting on the hope of the Resurrection where all things are made new, through forgiveness we can hold our relationships and communities together. We can live with the full knowledge of the debts owed and the sins committed and they not ultimately keep us from relationship and community.

Let’s pray.

SOURCES:

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