

Shiloh United Methodist Church

Matthew 18:21-35
& 3:13-17

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Forgiving Neighbor

Matthew 18:21-35 Common English Bible (CEB)

²¹ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?”

²² Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times. ²³ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. ²⁵ Because the servant didn’t have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. ²⁶ But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ ²⁷ The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan.

²⁸ “When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, ‘Pay me back what you owe me.’

²⁹ “Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ ³⁰ But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt.

³¹ “When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. ³² His master called the first servant and said, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. ³³ Shouldn’t you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt.

³⁵ “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don’t forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Matthew 3:13-17 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹³ At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him.¹⁴ John tried to stop him and said, “I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus answered, “Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.”

So John agreed to baptize Jesus. ¹⁶ When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. ¹⁷ A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him.”

Over the next month we will be exploring forgiveness. We are taking a whole month to dive into this for 2 reasons: 1. We are entering a contentious year for us as a nation and church. I believe as your pastor that it is my job to root myself and this congregation in deeply rooted Christian principles. Forgiveness is one of those. Going back to the teachings of Jesus and others I will share today. 2. This is one of the most important life skills we can learn to stay centered in the love of God, Jesus taught it and we serve ourselves and the world better by learning a skill that benefits us in so many ways.

There is a place that Christians talk about forgiveness every week, if we still hear what we say.

The Lord’s Prayer. “Forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” There is something powerful in that prayer about first recognizing God’s greatness, allowing God to shape us, give us enough, and then recognizing that we have to be forgiven and forgive to live into this. Forgiveness is an ancient part of what it means to be transformed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Forgiveness is a deeply held Christian belief, but I think for many of us we have picked up a lot of knowledge about forgiveness from popular culture.

I have these interesting activity I do when I am driving in traffic, trying to get somewhere. I pick a lane to get in. I hope it is the fastest lane, so I look at the car next to me or just in front of me in the other lane. I remember that car.

You all seem to know what I am talking about?

Then I see if I end up getting to the place, or through the light in front of that person or not. Somehow life seems more fair if I get there faster.

Many of you have parented, cared for children, or maybe like me you are in the midst of parenting. There is nothing more common of the parenting experience than the frustration of having to find an answer to the statement, “That is not fair.”

Whether it is the typical, “No it is not fair.” Or the much more sweeping, “Life is not fair.” Every parent has had to come up with the line they respond with.

How many of you have caught yourself, after saying your choice line, thinking, “Kid, I wish it were fair.”

We spend an extensive amount of time teaching our children that life is not fair, but if we really dig into that sentiment we still wish it was. We still hope for life to be more for us and our children than a series of unfair experiences.

This sentiment of fairness makes me believe that this has been a tendency for most of human existence. If we study scripture the tendency towards justice makes it clear that it has been true for the

entirety of Biblical history, so much so that Biblical authors whenever possible demonstrated when they felt God made the world more equal for all, or fair. The reality is though, many of us will face multiple situations where life is not fair. Either we do not have as much as we need of one thing, or a situation takes from us what we cared for and worked for, or any other number of challenges happen to us. Sometimes they will be caused by situations we cause, some that could only be changed by the miraculous and we place those in God's control, and sometimes the trespass will be caused by another person.

Jesus emphasis on forgiveness is one of the most clear realities in scripture. To find the full life God offers us, to experience forgiveness from God we must be willing to forgive others.

Recap of Matthew 18:

7x77

Ten Thousand Bags of Gold – a Gagillion, 1.5 lifetimes
Not forgiving the other, throwing the other in prison
Lord...all people had lords then, common experience.
Punishment...place?...or state when you can't forgive with your heart.

In preparation for this series I have studied multiple books on forgiveness. In fact some of you have said, "Which book goes along with this study." The reality is I couldn't find one that was concise for all of us. So, what this tells me is that everyone's forgiveness process is different.

However, I think we need practical tools. So, I have two recommendations. One is a book called *Forgive for Good* by a professor who studied forgiveness in the context of Northern Ireland, which has faced various realities of civil war and unrest and if forgiveness can happen there then the HEAL method in that book is worth looking at.

Today I am going to borrow a method from the Social Work Researcher and Storyteller, Brene Brown's book *Rising Strong*.

(Use Slide)

Forgiveness

Reckoning – Curiosity – Life

Rumble – Letting something die – Death

Revolution – Rewriting the story - Resurrection

LET IT GO

The Reckoning. Recognize emotion, and get curious about our feelings and how they connect with the way we think and behave.

The Rumble. Get honest about the stories we're making up about our struggle, then challenge these confabulations and assumptions to determine what's truth, what's self-protection, and what needs to change if we want to lead more wholehearted lives.

The Revolution. Write a new ending to our story based on the key learnings from our rumble and use this new, braver story to change how we engage with the world and to ultimately transform the way we live, love, parent and lead."

Judy Frank's video – See if you can find the elements I have shared in her story.

Judy's courage in sharing this story should be helpful to us. It demonstrates this process I talked about from Brene Brown and I believe highlights the new life Jesus' lifted up.

Bishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Reverend Mpho Tutu wrote:

To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. It is also a process that does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: The depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger.

However, when I talk of forgiveness, I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person. A better person than one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive, then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person, too.”

“So, forgiveness is not forgetting or walking away from accountability or condoning a hurtful act; it’s the process of taking back and healing our lives so we can truly live. What the Tutus found in their work on forgiveness validates not just the importance of naming our experiences and owning our stories but also how rumbling with a process can lead to clarity, wisdom and self-love. So often we want easy and quick answers to complex struggles. We question our own bravery, and in the face of fear, we back down too early.” – Brene Brown, *Rising Strong*

Part of worship and the community of faith is not backing down too early, it is to letting God work the process in us. This Sunday we remember Christ’s baptism, and our own. A symbol in our tradition of the real work God is doing to bring us into new life. Water was the

symbol because it is constantly being replaced in our body to make us new, and it was meant to remind us of this. When you come forward today, take a stone from these baptismal waters to remember that cleansing that happens each day in your life, when you turn to God.

Friends, as you journey on this path of following Jesus as you learn to forgive. Trust that God goes with you in this, that part of Christianity is knowing God learned through Christ how to forgive as humans do, and does not ask it of us lightly. May you find new life as you reckon, rumble, and experience the revolution of the new life Christ offers.

Amen