

Morning Worship 13th September 2020

Matthew 18:21-35

Forgive, forgive, forgive

Forgiveness for **brothers**

Peter was bothered. He found some of the other disciples got on his wick but he knew that Jesus was into love, so he thought he'd show that he'd go the message. 'How many times do I forgive one of these, when they keep on doing the same awful thing to me. I'll tell you—I'll forgive 7 times, aren't I impressive.'

Yes that did sound impressive. We find it hard enough to forgive one hurt, but to forgive the same one 7 times is amazing. And it went far beyond what others had recommended. Some of the teachers of Jesus day suggested 4 times and then that was it. They had a good biblical reason for this. In Amos God speaks to the various nations and repeatedly says:

For three sins of Damascus, (or where ever)
even for four, I will not turn back my wrath .

So if God forgave up to 4 times we can't be more gracious than him, can we? So Peter is being a bit daring.

But Jesus can't be doing with counting the times to forgive—just do it.

So then he tells a story to show why.

10,000 m—largest Greek number, talent largest money amount—this was the governor of a country, who owed the taxes and had failed to deliver them. He owed billions of pounds, and was forgiven the debt. His fellow servant owed him about £5000 yet he couldn't find it in him to forgive this debt.

So it seems we really ought to forgive others. But Jesus says more than that

Forgiveness needed **to be in the church**

Jesus says that unless we forgive, from the heart, we will not be forgiven. Unless you forgive and really mean it you cannot be reconciled with God, you will not be in the church. You have unchurched yourself.

It's funny how this is not mentioned. People argue that other faults—such as disagreeing over how to interpret the bible are what put you out of the church, but Jesus doesn't. He nowhere

ways you have to understand everything right, but he does say you must forgive.

Why? Well not forgiving is a major failure in love. How can you say you love someone and yet not forgive them. And the church, above all else is God's new people, a community a fellowship. IT cannot survive unforgiveness. This is the root of many of the problems in our churches—it is not the fact that people fail—we all do, but that people fail to forgive.

Forgiveness **how?**

So if forgiveness is so important how do we do it?

First believe you are forgiven—so often people don't feel they are good enough for God and just live like that. Well the good news is that you are right you aren't good enough, the best news is that God's loves you and forgives you and accepts you. He doesn't say I'll love you so long as you break that bad habit, I'll accept you if you stop being sarcastic. No he says I love you and accept you and forgive you over and over. Believe you are forgiven and marvel at the love God has for you. Of course if you don't think you've done anything all that bad, then you'll not really value this forgiveness—that was the problem the Pharisees had. They still thought God owed them for their good lives, we still have Pharisees in the church.

Next let God's love, forgiveness and acceptance sink in, it may take time to go from head knowledge to feeling it, but let it sink in. When it does you'll find the knowledge makes a difference. If God loves me like that, and calls me to be his follower, then I will try to love like that—I'll fail but I'll commit to it.

Next look at what it is that has been done to you and acknowledge it. Feel the pain. Forgiveness is not about just ignoring what has happened, or trying to pretend. No it is about feeling the pain, but reckoning that it is not as bad as the pain of losing this relationship. You have been hurt, you can choose to demand revenge and break the relationship, or you can choose to forgive, to accept he pain, but to reckon it as less than the breaking of the relationship.

This isn't always easy—story of Chris Bennett and Philip Swann and the motorbike. It isn't easy but it is the answer.

Finally be inspired by the example of others—St Botolph's destroyed by an IRA bomb, rebuilt and home to the Forgiveness Project. On their website there are stories of people who have learnt to forgive:

Anne Gallagher is a former nurse from the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) in Belfast. She tended to victims of bombs and bullets on both sides of the sectarian divide, as well as many policemen and soldiers. Having a father and three brothers interned in the early days of The Troubles, she has experienced the pain of having close relatives imprisoned and

killed. Her brother Dominic, a former IRA member, became leader of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and was, at the time, the most wanted man in Ireland. After his release from prison he was shot dead by unknown gunmen.

'Forgiveness isn't something that's talked about with reconciliation, but it's needed to bring closure to the pain and suffering experienced in Northern Ireland. You can't contemplate hope unless you address despair. To heal the wounds of Northern Ireland I believe you have to see humanity in the face of the enemy. But forgiveness is a journey. Today you can forgive and tomorrow you can feel pain all over again. I'm not a religious person, but for me forgiveness is about grace. To be able to forgive someone who has hurt you is a moment of grace. My mother is my driving force. She has such a respect for every single soul – even for the policemen and soldiers who raided our house and caused her so much pain.'

You can turn in on yourself or you can forgive. You can be bitter or you can try to be better. You can let the past dominate your life or you can look at now and see what could be in the future. Both roads will be painful—but to be part of God's people, you have to take the road marked forgiveness.