

Ordinary 23A - 2020

"I use your toothbrush!"

A certain married couple had many sharp disagreements. Yet somehow the wife always stayed calm and collected. One day her husband commented on his wife's restraint. "When I get mad at you," he said, "you never fight back. How do you control your anger?"

The wife said: "I work it off by cleaning the toilet."

The husband asked: "How does that help?"

She said: "I use your toothbrush!"

True Freedom in Forgiveness

When Bill Clinton met Nelson Mandela for the first time, he had a question on his mind: "When you were released from prison, Mr. Mandela," the former President said, "I woke my daughter at three o'clock in the morning. I wanted her to see this historic event."

Then President Clinton zeroed in on his question: "As you marched from the cellblock across the yard to the gate of the prison, the camera focused in on your face. I have never seen such anger, and even hatred, in any man as was expressed on your face at that time. That's not the Nelson Mandela I know today," said Clinton. "What was that about?"

Mandela answered, "I'm surprised that you saw that, and I regret that the cameras caught my anger. As I walked across the courtyard that day I thought to myself, 'They've taken everything from you that matters. Your cause is dead. Your family is gone. Your friends have been killed. Now they're releasing you, but there's nothing left for you out there.' And I hated them for what they had taken from me. Then, I sensed an inner voice saying to me, 'Nelson! For twenty-seven years you were their prisoner, but you were always a free man!

Don't allow them to make you into a free man, only to turn you into their prisoner!'" You can never be free to be a whole person if you are unable to forgive. (by King Duncan from *Collected Sermons*, www.Sermons.com)

"Seventy times seven times!"

Jesus' parable of the 'unforgiving servant' is found only in the Gospel of Matthew, where it is intended to be a moral exhortation for the Church on the need for forgiveness. Peter asked Jesus how often he ought to forgive his brother, and then answered his own question by suggesting that he should forgive seven times.

It was the Rabbinic teaching that a man must forgive his brother three times. The Biblical proof for this was taken from the first and second chapters of Amos where we find a series of condemnations on the various nations for three transgressions (Am.1:3, 6, 9; Am.1:11, 13; Am.2:1, 4, 6). From this it was deduced that God's forgiveness extends to three offenses, and that He visits the sinner with punishment at the fourth.

Also, seven was a holy number to Jewish people, symbolizing perfection, fullness, abundance, rest, and completion. Peter expected to be warmly commended. But Jesus' answer was that the Christian must forgive "seventy times seven times." In other words, **there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness.**

Forgiveness involves more than absolution of guilt. It involves reconciliation - the mending of our past, now-fractured, relationships and the healing of our mutual brokenness. It involves intentional work to heal and be reconciled with another. God awakens in us the wholeness that invites us to share in His holiness. Healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness, acting together, sketch a way of life embodying an ever-deepening friendship with God and with one another.

Loose cannon inside the ship in storm

French author Victor Hugo has a short story titled, "93." In the midst of this tale, a ship at sea is caught in a terrific storm. Buffeted by the waves, the ship rocks to and fro, when suddenly the crew hears an awesome crashing sound below deck. They know what it is. A cannon they are carrying has broken loose and is smashing into the ship's sides with every list of the ship. Two brave sailors, at the risk of their lives, manage to go below and fasten it again, for they know that the heavy cannon on the inside of their ship is more dangerous to them than the storm on the outside.

So it is with people. Problems within are often much more destructive to us than the problems without. Today, God's word would take us "below decks" to look inside ourselves concerning the whole matter of forgiveness.

Building Bridges

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in their 40 years of working together. It began with a small misunderstanding, and grew into a major difference, and finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning, there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there that I could help with? Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my younger brother! Last week, there was a meadow between us, but he took his bulldozer and dug a small river between us. Well I'm going to do him one better. See that pile of old lumber? I want you to build an 8-foot high fence between us. Then I won't need to see his place or his face anymore." The carpenter said, "Show me the nails and the tools, and I'll do a good job for you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he left for the day. At sunset, when he returned, his eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. The carpenter had built a bridge that stretched from one side of the river to the other, with handrails and all! And

his younger brother was coming toward them, his hand outstretched. "You're quite the guy," he said, "after all I've said and done."

The two brothers met in the middle, and shook each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter leaving. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

When you and I come to the end of our days, just remember this: God won't ask what kind of car we drove, but He will ask how many people we helped get where they needed to go. He won't ask how big our house was, but He will ask how many people we welcomed into our home. God won't ask what neighborhood we lived in, but He will ask how we treated our neighbors. And He won't ask how many fences we made, but He will ask how many bridges we built. (by Bob Tasler from *Restoration: Confronting the Brother*)