

“Forgiving and forgiven” OCUC 05.07.09

A little boy visiting his grandparents had been given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. As he came back to Grandma's back yard, he spied her pet duck, Lucy. On an impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and Lucy fell dead.

The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing. After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck! So Johnny did the dishes.

Later Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing. After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, finally he couldn't stand it. He confessed to Grandma that he'd killed the duck. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. But do you know what? Because I love you, I forgave you. Yet I've been wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you. (from Richard Hoefler's *book, Will Daylight Come?*) How good forgiveness tastes! How freeing it is!

Living as a Christian today is choosing a radical lifestyle. We will look different because Jesus calls us to be different. And if we just blend in to the rest of society then something is wrong with us. As Christians we need to be real, to be looking at our lives and checking out, "Am I really following Jesus in all the different aspects of my life? Above all we need to be people who reflect

grace, the grace of God, his love and forgiveness. And it's not just when we're out and 'on show' or just with our friends. Love and grace need to flow from our hearts., they need to be part of us, seeping out of us and touching others. We need to be real, authentic. Not just look good on the outside. So it's not good being mostly honest, mostly thoughtful of others, mostly compassionate, mostly forgiving. It's a bit like a piece of fruit. Sometimes at the end of the season you can buy some apples which look fine on the outside, but when you bite into them they are soft and mushy – obviously been sitting in storage for too long. We don't want to be like that.

Sin isn't a popular word these days, is it? You just don't use it in daily conversation. I looked up some synonyms on the computer dictionary. The list includes: offense, failing, indulgence, crime, transgression and wrongdoing. In the Macquarie dictionary sin is defined as 'a transgression against divine law'. I think of it like this: that when we sin we move away from God; we put our own will above God's will. We hurt God and we hurt others. God provides us a way out; he sent Jesus to die for us, once for all. And so we don't have to hold on to the past, no matter what heaviness is there; God forgives us. In Romans 3 Paul puts it like this, "Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by this grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.' vv22-25

What about forgiveness? The heart of our faith is knowing God forgives us, our sin is forgiven. Yet do our lives reflect the freedom and joy of knowing God's forgiveness, that nothing can separate us from the love of God.? Someone once put it like this: "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an

economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But **our greatest need** was forgiveness, so God sent us a Saviour.” How great is God’s love. We have an awesome God who is creator of all, holy and majestic, who forgives us.

Then comes the hard bit. God says, I forgive you; now you must forgive each other. Jesus teaches his disciples about this in Matthew 18. Peter asks Jesus ‘ Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’” Jesus answers: “ not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Jesus then goes on to tell the parable of the king and the servant.

What’s this parable all about? In the parable the king is generous in his treatment of the servant debtor who owes him a large amount. On the servant’s appeal for mercy, the king cancels the debt. Yet this same servant fails to be merciful to a fellow servant who owes him a trifle. On hearing about this the angry king recalls the first servant and throws him into prison. In Luke 6 Jesus says it clearly, ‘be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.’” Jesus helps us by saying at the end of this story, “this is how my heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” Note the words, “from your heart,” not just shallow words. No, Jesus says forgive for your heart, from deep within.

It is pretty straightforward, isn’t it? You don’t put a limit on forgiveness, like ‘I’ll forgive you five times and then that’s it. Jesus says keep on forgiving, just as God forgives you. That’s what it’s all about, isn’t it? We need to remember and really see the full value of the forgiveness we are granted because of Jesus. God forgives our sin because of Jesus. Just as we have been forgiven, we must forgive others. That is God’s rule for us, and if we ignore it Jesus says, there will be consequences.

Yet forgiveness isn't easy, especially when we have been hurt deeply. We do need to acknowledge pain, rather than say 'it doesn't matter.' In our bodies pain tells us that something isn't right and needs attention. It's the same in relationship with others: pain tells us that something isn't right and needs to be worked on. Yet forgiveness is essential too before relationship can be restored. I came upon some helpful pointers by Roy Smith . He suggests that: 'The art of forgiving is a spiritual grace every Christian should develop.' He offers the following suggestions that might help when you find it hard to forgive someone:

- 1) Get things in perspective. Remember that compared to Christ's suffering you haven't been seriously wronged at all.
- 2) Recall the many kind deeds that have been shown to you, perhaps even by the person who has harmed you.
- 3) List the benefits/ blessings you have received from the Lord.
- 4) Thank God for blessing you with His love and forgiveness each day.
- 5) Try praying for the one who has injured you.
- 6) Go even further by looking for an opportunity to help him.
- 7) If the offense is especially hard to forget, try to erase the memory by thinking gracious and generous thoughts.
- 8) Finally, before you fall asleep at night, repeat slowly and thoughtfully that phrase from the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

One of the great motivators to forgive is to look at what happens to us when we don't. Have you seen it in others? Unforgiveness becomes like a cancer in our lives. It eats away at our hearts, we become resentful and then bitter. It robs us of heart peace. It traps us in the past where the event took place. We are unable to appreciate and enjoy fully the present and all that it offers because we continue to look back. Also we stay bound to that person /persons we haven't forgiven. So we are less available to enjoy present and new relationships.

There are no gains in unforgiveness, only lots of misery. In fact unforgiveness can cause physical sickness.

This is something that is often encountered by those who have been active in the healing ministry. Tom Jewett, in his book, *the Good news that nobody wanted to know*, discusses this very parable and give a couple of examples of the healing of people who had held on to unforgiveness. An elderly lady who was a regular attender at Tom's Mission in London, brought her housekeeper along. She had resigned because she was crippled with arthritis. The housekeeper cried as she knelt at the communion rail, not because of repentance but out of pain. She didn't have much English however she had a faith in Jesus. Tom explained that we must forgive others from our hearts before we ask for healing. She willingly accepted this. Tom lead her in a prayer of forgiving all others, after asking the Holy Spirit in the Name of Jesus, to help her remember all those folk He though she needed to forgive. Then came a flood of names from the woman kneeling. They never really came to the end of the prayer because when she had said the last name, she jumped up and down on the spot, waving her hands in the air, declaring that she was healed and the pain gone. Praise the Lord.

Finally a couple more things we need to remember when we are faced with the need to forgive. Forgiveness is a choice, it's an act of our wills. It's not about our feelings, it's not about deciding who's in the right or wrong, it is making a decision that "I am no longer going to hold ill will against that person. I let it go." It might take a little while for our feeling to caome into line with that decision, but they will in time. The most important thing however is that we forgive, because God forgives us. That's the bottom line, if you like. And the Lord has said, I will send the Spirit to be with you. Forgiveness is an act of grace. We don't have the resources by ourselves to do it, but as we ask Jesusfor help, so the Spirit will come to us and enable us to do what seems impossible.

Forgiveness will flow from our hearts. That's the grace of God. Not in our strength, but in his. Thanks be to God.