

Matthew 18.21-35. Mitford 10.30 14 Sep 2014

- In today's reading Peter has been thinking through some of Jesus teaching about how we should act towards one another. He approaches Jesus with a question- Master how many times must I forgive my brother – should I do it, say 7 times.
 - "I wouldn't say seven times, that is nowhere near enough" replies Jesus, "you should think more like seventy seven times"
- Then to illustrate his point Jesus launches out into another parable
- He tells of this servant who owed his master a phenomenal amount of money. Ten thousand talents-.
 - The talent was the largest item of currency around in those days
 - and the largest unit of counting was 10,000- muria in Greek I think?
 - So Jesus is deliberately picking the biggest coinage and the biggest figure to make a point.
- This guy is in deep trouble- the debt he is talking about is awesome –
 - equivalent to 300,000 man years of wages for your average Hebrew labourer.
- Yet what happens? He pleads for forgiveness and his master takes pity on him, writes the whole lot off.
- This, says Jesus is what being in a relationship with God is like – you just cannot fathom the scale of his love.
 - Come up with whatever number you can dream of- God is infinitely more generous.
 - However far you have fallen away, come back and he will restore you.
 - Fresh starts, a real welcome- a free offer that experience tells us each of us so desperately needs to grasp
- But so far we have only read half the parable- what happens next?
 - This servant goes out from his master's hall and immediately launches into recovering a tiny loan of his own.
 - It is only one millionth of the debt he has just been cleared of, but still he demands his pound of flesh.
- Hearing of this the master calls the servant back-
 - OK you have chosen to play the justice rather than the mercy card he says, so justice it will be-
 - the servant finds himself saddled back again with his unpayable debt.
- Doesn't this parable say so much about our relationship with God and with one another? For you cannot separate them, they are so intertwined.
 - When you help the least in my name, you do it for me, says Jesus elsewhere in the gospels.
 - The God who expresses himself in relationship as Father Son and Spirit meets us in others, through others.
- And He who expresses his infinite mercy in Jesus calls us to play our small part through our approach to others.

- I cannot enjoy some selfish one dimensional God- me existence, I need to see that every single one of us is just as precious to Him as I am.
 - Our approach to them needs to reflect this, not least in terms of forgiveness.
- Forgiveness actually lies at the heart of how we see God, ourselves and others.
 - By refusing to forgive we are saying that we are the only one that truly matters,
 - the offence to us that counts far more than any hurt experienced by all others, God included.

- Did you notice the number of times Jesus said we should forgive?
 - Go for seventy seven times he suggested.
- In saying that I wonder if he had in mind a passage from way back in Genesis Chapter 4, which describes Lamech, son of Cain a rather nasty piece of work.
 - Making sure his wives knew who was boss Lamech told them
 - My wives listen to what I say: I have killed a man for just wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech is avenged seventy seven fold”
- Don’t mess with me, cross me and I will come back far, far harder he is telling them.
 - Do that and I’ll make you sorry.
- So maybe Jesus is using Lamech’s murderous 77 fold retribution as a way of highlighting the kingdom principle of forgiving 77 times.
 - Forget your grudges, move on, forgive is his call.

- All very well in theory we may say, but the world isn’t like that
 - You cannot write off the debts of the poorer nations just like that- it would destroy the whole economic system.
 - You can’t let people walk over you or steal from you- they need to be called to account.
 - If you keep being hurt or offended, then at some point, somehow it needs to be addressed.
- Good points, all very true. There is a world of difference between forgiving and ignoring wrongs,
 - People do need to recognise the consequences of their actions - Victims do require protection.
 - Ask any parent who has had to place their youngster on the naughty step,
 - ask Bishop Desmond Tutu as he chaired the post apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
 - In this we follow the Christ who didn’t brush such matters under the carpet, but when appropriate was unafraid to speak out
- But in doing so we need to approach such issues in a way that heals, restores, redeems.

- The God who is happy to come and show the way through to new life wants us to find ways to offer fresh love, hope, restored relations to others too. In His eyes, all His children matter.
- Our experience of forgiveness needs to transform our approach to those we interact with.
 - Forgiving and being forgiven are indivisible
- Think of it like the experience of breathing-
 - stop exhaling forgiveness, restoration, new hope to others and there is no space in your lungs to inhale that which you so desperately need yourself.
 - By ceasing to give you can no longer receive
- Does this all seem just too hard? Jesus expecting us to forgive as many times as needed?
 - Yet unless we do, what is the alternative-
 - lives stunted by bitterness, resentment, full blown hatred?
- I'm no expert but it seems to me that every conflict across this world appears to be justified on righting some perceived injustice, some wrong from the past.
 - And how often can broken marriages, family estrangements, church conflicts be traced back to some unforgiven behaviour, attitude, words?
- These are no little matters, but if we are to take Jesus teaching seriously, we need to keep striving to move forward.
- The truth is that we will rarely get it right immediately
 - Forgiveness, like bereavement and healing, is a process rather than a one off event- it can take time-
 - the old memories and emotions will keep popping up when we least expect them- and then we need to ask God for the grace to forgive all over again.
- When this happens, we shouldn't worry too much – just take each occasion as it arises-
 - the very expression of our difficulty to God is moving ourselves from centre stage, making space for the True Source of all forgiveness to enter the situation.
 - Just as in every other aspect of our lives, his Spirit is there just longing to work with us,
 - We never need to try and cope alone-we only need to invite him in
- One day, somewhere down the line we are going to run out of opportunities to forgive. And as we stand in front of God on that day looking for mercy, what sort of person will He see-
 - one who has cruised through life looking after our own self interest, ensuring nobody got one over on us, yet ignoring the harm and hurt we have been causing ourself
 - or will he see a child of His, one who has heard Jesus call to forgive and has kept trying to follow. A scruffy but willing child, who has failed countless times to get it right, but has never given up.

- In a few minutes we will join together in the Lords Prayer, asking our Father to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 - From today onwards, every time we say those words may we ask for the gift of forgiving hearts.
- And so as His agents of forgiveness and love, peace and reconciliation may the Kingdom of Christ become that bit more real through our lives and the lives of those we touch. Amen