

## Sermon for February 20, 2022

We know forgiveness is important. We know we should forgive others who have sinned against us. But as I started talking with people about forgiveness, I found it's really hard to define. If you forgive someone does that mean you're saying what they did was alright? When you forgive, does that mean you have to forget about what they did to you? What I discovered was we have a lot of questions about forgiveness and in the midst of all these questions, we hear Jesus teaching that we are to love our enemies. If you watched the video I put on Facebook earlier this week, you know a bit about the greek word for love and enemy and how loving our enemies is actually an act of justice for our enemies, humanity and for us.

Remember, the Gospel of Luke is saturated with God's will for justice in the world then and today. We talked about Jesus' sermon on the plain last week with the four blessed and four woe statements. Often, we think Jesus' sermon ends there, but it doesn't. It continues throughout chapter six. Jesus was a true pastor and loved to talk. So today is actually the continuation of his sermon on the plain and continues his call for justice.

When I was little, I really didn't like this verse because I thought Jesus was telling us to be a doormat. People should step us on, use us, and toss us aside. I hated that idea. It started to make me think of his death in that same way. Jesus was so docile in his death, allowing Rome to beat and kill him. Is that what we are supposed to be? Is that what we are supposed to do? No. Emphatically, no! As a follower of Jesus, as Christians, we are supposed to be anything but docile in the face of injustice. For example, when Jesus says turn the other cheek, he is not saying if someone hits you on one cheek, offer the other so they can hit you on each of your cheeks. The culture in which Jesus was living was based on honor and shame. That's hard for us to understand because we live in a culture of wealth. Worth and status is based on how much money you have. In Jesus' culture, worth and status was based on your honor. It's similar to Asian culture. A friend of mine who is a pastor was showing some seminary students around the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. However, they do not allow cameras in the museum. The students had very expensive cameras and were very nervous to part from them. The tour guide said to leave them on the curb and promised the cameras would be there when they returned. This is ludicrous in our culture. Of course they would be stolen in minutes but that's because our culture is based on wealth and those cameras give the one who owns them a lot of status. In Asian countries, if you take something that is not yours, it brings you much shame. Therefore, the students

spent three hours in the museum and came out to find their cameras exactly where they left them. No one in that culture would dream of taking them. That is the culture of Jesus' time. Jesus was brilliant and was able to use those rules of honor and shame to practice nonviolence resistance.

Jesus says when someone hits you, turn the other cheek. Well, first, we need to know that the only hand one is able to hit with is the right hand because the left was used for unclean tasks. There was no toilet paper in Jesus' time so wiping after using the bathroom was only done with the left hand. Thus, using it in social situations was dishonorable. So, if someone hits you across your left cheek with their right hand, turn your right cheek to them. They cannot hit you with their left hand and they cannot hit you with the back of their right hand because that shows that the two of you are on the same social level, which means hitting an equal is dishonorable. By turning your cheek, it doesn't give them another opportunity to hit you. It actually makes it impossible for the person to hit you again without bringing shame onto themselves.

Jesus continues, if anyone takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Your coat, or cloaks, was the most important garment you owned. It was made of wool or a very thick fabric because it was your blanket at night. It gets cold at night in the middle east and people needed their cloaks to stay warm. It was also protection from the weather. It was vital, so when someone sues you and takes even your cloak, call them out on it. Because trails were public. You went to the city center and went before the judge in front of all the people and publicly accused someone. Taking someone's cloak was like taking everything they had, so Jesus said to call them out on it. Give them everything, even your shirt, which would mean that you are standing there, in front of everyone naked. You are making a public statement that this person is taking everything you own and that is dishonorable. They may be wrong, but you can't take everything from someone and leave them destitute.

Finally, Jesus says to give without asking for anything in return. Another aspect of the culture in Jesus' time was the patron-client relationship. Often, this relationship was abused. The patron, or the one giving money or goods, would exploit the client, who received the money or goods. The client became eternally indebted to the patron as did their future generations. This is where the word grace actually came from. The patron would give to their client out of helpfulness, expecting nothing in return. That's the exact thing Jesus tells us to do in this passage. Show each other grace, giving and not expecting anything in return. We know Jesus expanded that definition, but grace historically was what a patron should show

their client. So again, Jesus was calling for justice when this relationship was being abused.

Non-violently exposing injustice is what Jesus is asking us to do. When we are confronted by our enemies, we resist them by exposing their corruption, which is exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He hung there for all to see how corrupt Rome was because Jesus and everyone there knew he was innocent. The words he spoke on the cross were words of love and forgiveness not words of anger and revenge. Jesus, through his words and actions, exposed the injustices being done to him and showed us how to show love to our enemies and do you remember what happened. A soldier, after he had died he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.” A Roman soldier. The enemy’s heart was changed because of the love Jesus showed his enemies on the cross.

So perhaps what Jesus is saying is that the act of forgiveness is actually an act of nonviolent resistance to an act of injustice. The act of forgiveness is saying I am no longer going to carry this baggage of anger, resentment, hurt around with me. I’m no longer going to let it dictate my life or how I feel. I release this baggage.

I want to end this sermon with the words of Debbie Thomas, who leads spiritual formation at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Palo Alto, California. **“Forgiveness isn’t pretending that an offense doesn’t matter, or that a wound doesn’t hurt. Forgiveness isn’t acting as if things don’t have to change. Forgiveness isn’t allowing ourselves to be abused and mistreated, or assuming that God has no interest in justice. Forgiveness isn’t synonymous with healing or reconciliation. Healing has its own timetable, and sometimes reconciliation isn’t possible. In fact, sometimes our lives depend on us severing ties with our offenders, even if we’ve forgiven them. In other words, forgiveness is not cheap. Forgiveness is a process — a messy, non-linear, and often barbed process that might leave us feeling healed and liberated one minute, and bleeding out of every pore the next. Consider that before Joseph forgives his brothers, he wrestles with a strong desire to scare and shame them. In fact, he *does* scare and shame them. Forgiveness is something Joseph has to arrive at, slowly and painfully. There is only life, lived one layered, complicated, and unsentimental moment at a time. But because God is in our story, we can hope for the resurrection of all things. There will be another turn, another chapter, another path, another grace.”**