

Clergy

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Highlights from Pastor Alvin's sermon last Sunday

Are you following his teachings?

Today I want to talk with you about forgiveness and living as a reflection of God's kingdom. We serve a loving Lord who has called us to love when others hate, to reach-out when others walk by, and to forgive when others hold grudges. But have you noticed how hard it is to forgive ... at times. If life has taught me anything, it has taught me that forgiveness is most often a process ... but never give up trying.

One day, Peter had had enough. The Scripture says:

"21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' 22 Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seven times seventy.'" (Matthew 18:21-22)

He had forgiven one of his fellow disciples again and again and was finished with forgiveness. But he had enough maturity to ask Jesus: "Lord, isn't seven times enough forgiveness?"

Peter, I am sure, felt he was being generous by allowing seven times for forgiveness.

After all, Jesus had once taught his disciples: "If your brother or sister sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent ...,' forgive him."(Luke 17:4)

But what I have experienced is that forgiveness is not so simple. It is usually not so hard to forgive people we don't know. But the people with whom we have a relationship of trust ... who turn on us ..., who betray our trust – those people are the hardest to forgive. Think about it: husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, boyfriends and girlfriends, our best friends, neighbors, and fellow co-workers.

But here is the bottom line: The path of health begins with the process of forgiveness. But the path of healing is forgiving.

You may think your hurt and anger too massive to forgive. Perhaps you do not feel you are able to forgive that person at this time.

Then pray to the Lord; pray the following prayer: "Lord, I find it beyond my ability to forgive this person. I ask you to make me able to forgive in the future."

Even that prayer may stretch your faith and challenge your emotions and spirit, but pray it anyway. The God of Forgiveness answers prayers like this when we are persistent. He makes a way where there is no way. He takes us beyond ourselves.

This past week I came across a quote that was quite sobering for me. SO let me share this quote, this NEWSFLASH, with you:

“unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the OTHER PERSON to die.” (PAUSE)

Today God wants to teach us (at least) one spiritual lesson about the power of forgiveness that has the potential to change our lives.

That spiritual lesson is this: Don't allow the sin or unforgiveness in your past to define your future, or keep you from reaching your God-given potential.

So hear this: Do not give-up before the victory is yours. God has forgiven (erased) the record of our past wrongs from the Divine Computer. That's what Joseph's brother discovered as Joseph said: “Even though you intended to do harm ..., God intended it for good.”

You see, we cannot afford to define our identity in the present or in the future by the mistakes, sins, or pain of the past. Author David Augsberger says: “If we wait until someone deserves forgiveness, forget it!”

So let me challenge you to go forth with a Christian attitude. Go forth determined to show mercy. Go forth with a heart that is willing to forgive ... let go of the beach ball that may be interfering with your ability to forgive and live as a reflection of God's Kingdom ... and don't let your past define your future! It is God's grace that enables each one of us to move past mistakes, sins, and pain of the past. You see, it is only when we – truly and deeply realize that Christ has forgiven us – that can we truly and deeply forgive others and ourselves. This is the power of forgiveness that results in reconciliation! This is power of Christ in us that enables us to live as a reflection of God's kingdom ... here and now.