

RENT FREE
Genesis 50:15-21; Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult theological issues for people to grasp. One theologian describes the inability to forgive another as allowing that person to live in your mind and life rent free.

One prisoner of war asked another, "Have you forgiven your captors yet?"

"I will never do that," the second one answered.

"Then they still have you in prison, don't they?" the first replied.

Rabbi Harold Kushner tells this story:

A woman in his congregation came to see him. She was a single mother, working to support herself and three young children. She said to the Rabbi, "Since my husband walked out on us, every month is a struggle to pay our bills. I have to tell my kids we have no money to go to the movies, while he's living it up with his new wife in another state. How can you tell me to forgive him?" Rabbi Kushner answered her, "I'm not asking you to forgive him because what he did was acceptable. It wasn't. It was mean and selfish. I'm asking you to forgive because he doesn't deserve the power to live in your head and turn you into a bitter, angry woman. I'd like to see him out of your life emotionally as completely as he is out of it physically, but you keep holding on to him. You're not hurting him by holding on to the resentment, but you are hurting yourself." The failure to forgive disrupts, distorts, and degrades community.

Joseph, in the reading from Genesis, had not held a grudge against the brothers who had sold him into slavery. He had not allowed them to live in his brain "rent free" but had led his life as God directed and was ready to help his brothers in their time of need.

Nearly every day someone says or does something that could be hurtful – if you or I wanted to take it that way. But why spend our time looking for ways to be hurt or offended?

Have you ever wondered what the world might be like if everyone practiced limitless forgiveness? Is it even possible?

"When we can look at those who inflict pain on us and see brothers and sisters, practicing what Desmond Tutu calls 'Ubuntu,' then we can begin to forgive as we have been forgiven."

Jesus is calling us to give up calculating offenses and forgiveness(es); and instead to have a forgiving heart; a forgiven heart; a heart for forgiveness. This is a shift of ATTITUDE. But it is not an "anything goes" attitude. Forgiveness actually stands FOR some things; and therefore, does NOT stand for everything."

Forgiveness effects the one forgiving in very real ways that have been documented by physicians and psychiatrists.

Forgiveness boosts your self-esteem and lowers your blood pressure and heart rate. Forgiveness also helps you sleep better at night and boosts a positive change in your attitude. "Forgiveness is an intellectual decision you make to give up your anger and feelings of revenge," declared psychiatrist Richard Fitzgibbons. He added that forgiving is not forgetting; it is letting go of anger and hurt and moving on.

Studies have found that those who forgive no longer had feelings of anxiety and depression and felt better about themselves. "Forgiveness has remarkable healing power in the lives of those who utilize it," added Dr. Fitzgibbons.

"Forgiveness is more than a moral imperative, more than a theological dictum. It is the only means, given our humanness and imperfections, to overcome hate and condemnation, and proceed with the business of growing and loving," says psychologist Paul Coleman.

Today I offer you the opportunity to rid yourselves of those things that weigh you down. Those things that separate you from one another and from God. These smaller vessels symbolize each of us, filled with things, sharp edges, hard feelings, large and small stones that separate and offend.

As I read the prayer you are invited to come as you feel led and pour out those things you hold inside, the times you have hurt someone or have been hurt, pour it out, let it go and in this basket receive this tangible reminder that you are FORGIVENESS, now and for always, by the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Ritual of Pouring and of Pouring Out

Hear us as we pray, O Lord.

Forgive me my sins, O Lord. Forgive me the sins of my youth, and the sins of my age.

The sins of my soul and the sins of my body.

My secret sins and my whispered sins ...the sins I have done to please myself...

And the sins I have done to please others. Forgive those sins which I know and those which I do not know.

Forgiven them, Lord, forgive them all in your great goodness.

I pour out my sins of pride, unbending, unyielding arrogance, self-righteous zeal for perfection, damning judgments, vicious grasps of my own destiny.

I pour out my sins of refusal to take my place, cowering fear, spineless accommodation, failure to speak, unwillingness to be counted.

MORE LOVE TO THEE O CHRIST! MORE LOVE TO THEE

I pour out my sins of envy, harboring desires for another's I'll, coveting another's gifts or call, betraying confidences, giving way to spasms of jealousy.

I pour out my sins of lack of desire, not yearning for what is good, what is better, too self-absorbed to care, succumbing to distraction, drifting to oblivion.

MORE LOVE TO THEE! O CHRIST! MORE LOVE TO THEE

I pour out my sins of anger, hostile words, sullen silence, fuming impatience, venomous retaliation.

I pour out my sins of apathy, callous indifference, submission, failure to protest injustice or to rage against the dying of light.

MORE LOVE TO THEE! O CHRIST, MORE LOVE TO THEE

I pour out my sins of lust, exploiting one another, gorging my own satisfaction, grasping at passion, careless disregard for boundaries.

I pour out my sins of passivity, ignoring my body, rejecting my senses, turning away from touch, refusing connection.

MORE LOVE TO THEE, O CHRIST! MORE LOVE TO THEE

I pour out my sins of greed, devouring the inheritance of others, filling my closets, giving only what I can spare, hoarding smiles, or love, or mercy.

I pour out my sins of hesitation, satisfaction with monotony, content with shallowness, not opening my hands to receive, giving without joy.

MORE LOVE TO THEE, O CHRIST! MORE LOVE TO THEE

I pour out my sins of gluttony, demanding more than my share, wasting food and people and time, grasping achievement, consuming beauty or freedom or love.

I pour out my sins of refusing pleasure, disregarding my hungers, staying utterly slobber, never smacking my lips at a feast, or laughing uncontrollably.

MORE LOVE TO THEE, O CHRIST, MORE LOVE TO THEE

I pour out my sins of weak tolerance, failure of purpose, easy distraction, sliding into dullness.

I pour out my sins of overwork, cramming one more task into the day, ignoring family, abusing my body forgetting God.

MORE LOVE TO THEE, O CHRIST, MORE LOVE TO THEE

We pour out the sands of our brokenness, as we wait upon your grace.

Pour out your cleansing mercy, O God. Let it wash over me and scrub my iniquity. Pour out forgiveness, O God. Your great forgiving love; let it come down upon my head and rinse me clean.

Pour out renewing grace,

Make me holy,

Make me whole

Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.