Pentecost 16 Forgiveness

Hello, my name is Aprille Jordan, and I am pastor at Valley of Christ Lutheran Church in Frenchtown.  Today’s sermon is based on the gospel reading which is about forgiveness and it begins with a question for Jesus from Peter, which is *“How often should I forgive?” 7 Times?”*

Jesus replies, *no, not 7 times but 77 times,* or in another translation:

70 times 7.

Jesus says basically don’t be counting, just do it. And then he tells a story about forgiveness.

A slave who has been forgiven an unimaginably huge debt,

-- refuses to forgive the comparatively small debt of a fellow slave!

-- It seems ridiculous!  How can anyone do such a thing?

But then again, forgiveness is not easy, in fact it’s very hard to forgive someone who has wronged us.

How many times have you heard or even said something like:

--*I will never forgive that drunk driver OR*

*--I will never forgive my brother who cheated me out of my inheritance*

*--I will never forgive my neighbor for what she has done to me, over and over*

*-I cannot forgive my husband who betrayed me OR*

Sometimes we cannot forgive ourselves!

*-I cannot forgive myself for hurting/cheating/lying/betraying my family member or my friend*

Forgiveness is a hard choice!

Still, Jesus teaches it because forgiveness, first of all, is good for you.

Our failure to forgive leaves us sick in body, mind, and spirit.

Interestingly enough:

--While all of the world’s major religions teach about the necessity of forgiveness, recently it’s been discovered by the medical and scientific world that forgiveness is important for health and well-being.

--So it’s not just a spiritual or moral happening between me and God.

It is now widely known that unforgiveness,

--or holding on to past hurts and resentments,

--deeply affects our emotional and physical health.

Take the case of a woman named Scarlett Lewis.

Scarlett lost her 6-year-old son Jesse in the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. These school shootings are nightmares come to life! Jesse was one of 20 children killed and then the shooter killed himself.

--Parents such as Scarlett were devastated.  At first, her anger sapped all of her energy and strength.  Her rage was directed at the shooter.

But then she made the choice to forgive. She made that choice to forgive that shooter! That’s Big!

--*“Forgiveness felt like I was given a big pair of scissors”* she said to reporters. These scissors helped her to cut her tie to the shooter and regain her personal power and a sense of well-being.

-- *“It started as a choice, and then became a process”* she added. It didn’t just happen in an instance. No, it was a process of choosing forgiveness over and over.

-- And at her son’s funeral, she urged mourners to change their angry thoughts into loving thoughts.  She saw this shift as a way to change the world, both her own world and the world at large.

Forgiveness starts with a choice and then becomes a process.

That’s a key concept. Forgiveness is a choice!

I like what the Christ in our Home devotional says about making that choice to forgive:

*“Making the choice to forgive someone means we are choosing not to give that hurt power over our lives anymore.  What’s more, if its not healthy to do so, we do not have to allow others back into our lives I order to forgive them!*

*--*And we don’t want to let them back into our lives and thoughts because they are the source of our hurt and resentments.

Instead:

*-Forgive them fully from the heart,*

*-Release them to God*

*-and then move on with your life!”*

In the Greek, the word Forgiveness means to “*release”,* to let go of the other.

SO, --Forgiveness is a possibility only when we acknowledge the negative impact of another person’s actions or attitudes on our lives.

--Then we can move on to releasing them to God and move on with our lives.

Course maybe the reason it seems hard for me to forgive and move on with my life is because I don’t believe THAT I AM really forgiven.

Every Sunday we begin with a confession of our sins, and we hear God’s promise of forgiveness for all our sins.

---BUT, no matter how often we hear God’s promise of forgiveness, it’s easy to become convinced that we have done things to disqualify ourselves from God’s forgiveness.

A young woman sat in my office in tears.  She was 6 months pregnant with their first child.  She and her husband were married for 4 years and were regular churchgoers.

--But now she was crying because she found out he had cheated on her with a woman from his workplace. *“How could he do that to me, to us?  I can’t forgive him!”*

But she did forgive him.

--And then he was in my office.  He was woefully remorseful for his wrongdoing and said he couldn’t forgive himself.

We talked about God’s forgiveness, and he said I can’t even pray for that, or believe God can actually forgive me. *No, I can’t forgive myself.*

A forgiven person forgives.  Both themselves and others.

AND so we need to take heart God’s words of forgiveness through Christ our Lord Jesus who died on the cross—and from the cross said, “*Forgive them for they know not what they are doing*.”

No, God doesn’t just say to us “*Don’t feel guilty”* or *“Don’t be ashamed”* either.

--God says “*here is what I’ve done about your sins, and your guilt and shame.  I have heaped it all on Christ and he’s carried it for you, drowning all yours sins and guilt in my grace.”*

God says,

Here’s what I think of you, with all of your shame (and I wanted that husband to hear this too)

-- For this is God’s gospel truth: “*I love you more than you could love or hate yourself.  You are mine.  In my name all your sins are forgiven”.*

God has wiped your past sins clean from his memory. *“I remember your sins no more!”*

*--"Nothing will be held against you.  I don’t care whether you deserve it or not:  for you are mine—doubts, insincerity, guilt, shame, remorse, and all.  You are mine and I forgive you.”*

When God forgives you so freely and thoroughly, you can do the same with yourself and your neighbors.  That’s why Jesus put the prayer together the way it is:  *forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*

--this is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, it’s what we pray daily, and

--Jesus isn’t trying to make a deal with us.  This isn’t a contract, as in if you forgive then I, God will forgive you. No, its an invitation.

Afterall, God even forgives our failures to forgive others too!

God invites us to bask in his love and know in our hearts that

--God loves us and continues to forgive us despite our repeated sins.

So ask God for a softened heart, toward ourselves and others.

God intends the forgiveness *to go through us*, to our neighbor.

-- A forgiven person forgives. And as that happens, it’s a sure sign that the Spirit is at work,

-- that you too may be empowered to live a Spirit filled life of loving forgiveness. AMEN