

June 2, 2019

## **When We Are Hurt, We Are to Forgive**

### Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

### Sermon

Each week as I prepare for a sermon and, believe it or not, I do prepare for a sermon. I always start with the reading of the lessons for the day. And I also, as I go through the week, as I return to those lessons each day, I also pay attention to what's going on in the world, what's going on in the news. Occasionally, one really affects the other, as I believe that the gospel is relevant to us today and I believe the news is relevant to us as well.

This is one of those weeks where the two really came together for me. In the gospel reading, again we're hearing Jesus praying for His disciples. He has already told them that He is sending them out. He has told them that His commandment for them is to love one another as He has loved them. Now He says something significant, I think, to us in that He says, "I pray not only for these, but for those who will believe because of their work." He is praying for us. He's praying for all those who have heard the gospel, who have accepted it as truth and have tried, as best they can, to follow in that way.

So, think about that for a moment. Jesus is praying for you. We often think of ourselves as praying to God, praying to Jesus, praying for one another. But Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, prays for us. Because more than any other Person of the Trinity, He knows how difficult it is to walk this road, how the temptations can build up, how hard it is to deal with human beings who don't always hear truth well. And as He was talking about the people becoming one, again those beyond the disciples, that they may be one as you and I, the Father and I, are one.

There was this desire for us to be together, for us to be completely and wholly and even perfectly one. That seems to be the vision that Jesus has for the world, that the people find a way through the Holy Spirit, through what He has brought into the world to be truly and wholly one. We often refer to that in the church as being like family and that's a great symbol. It's a great idea, except for the fact that family doesn't always get along together very well. And we've seen that right from the beginning of time, right from the beginning.

With the gospel reading and with what happened in Virginia, the shooting in Virginia, I reflected on how being family and about being one and about being forgiven, since that was the very focus of the message when Jesus started His earthly ministry, I've come to preach repentance and forgiveness. It drew me back to the Genesis story of the first act of aggression. Isn't it interesting that it was family? It was Cain and Abel, brothers. It

was about family. It was about anger and not forgiveness and it was about religion. Isn't that interesting, too, that Cain was so angry.

He was upset that God preferred the sacrifice of Abel to Cain's. And rather than direct that anger at God and rather than deal with the hurt that he felt by trying to do something better, he is hurt, and he aims that at his brother and hurt became anger and anger became aggression. And he raised his hand against his brother and killed him. That says something to me about how devastating a lack of forgiveness is because I think what we saw in Virginia is this same kind of progression. A man who was hurt, that he wasn't being treated as he should have been, that he had been let go from his job. And rather than being forgiven, rather than trying to find a way to do better or to move forward, that hurt became anger.

That anger became an act of taking weapons and killing his fellow workers, not because they were the cause of his hurt, but simply because the whole became a target for his aggression. Jesus, when He comes on the scene, He says, "I've come to preach a gospel of repentance and forgiveness, acknowledgement of where we go wrong and of what we do wrong and to turn away from that in order to be forgiven." And that's how we often interpret that, that what we're really looking for is to be forgiven for our sins. We look to be forgiven for the things that we do intentionally or unintentionally to hurt others.

And if we care about them, if we're in relationship with them, we want that to be repaired and the only way that can be repaired is if we are forgiven. Too often we forget that when we are hurt intentionally or unintentionally, then it is up to us now to forgive that other person, whether they ask for it or not. That is what we are taught as Christians. If you remember the Old Testament golden rule to treat others as you would have them treat you. Doesn't say treat them the way you were treated; if they hurt you, hurt them back. Treat others in all circumstances the way you would want to be treated.

All of us want to be forgiven for the things that we have done to hurt others that we care about. All of us want to be forgiven for the sins that we have committed against God, in turning away from God and not trusting God and not loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. And when we don't forgive, when we take hurt personally, when we refuse to forgive, when we don't even think about forgiving, when we just dwell on the hurt, it becomes larger and larger, it begins to consume us. And it turns from hurt into anger. We've seen it repeatedly, not only in this country, but throughout the world.

Hurts that aren't forgiven become anger. Anger consumes and overcomes us and when that happens, it can take a couple of different forms. It can take the form of anger towards we in believing that the hurt was the right thing, that whatever they said, or they did was deserved. And so, the anger is turned inward. The anger is turned into self-loathing's. The anger can even be turned into such anguish that one hurts oneself or kills oneself. More often, the target of that anger becomes the other. Luckily, it doesn't usually turn into the kind of aggression that we have seen in so many of the mass shootings, but it still becomes a consuming anger that hurts the person, but it also takes many different forms to hurt the other.

We, as Christians, are called to forgive. It's important for us to know and to remember that we need to first forgive the little things, to be aware of the times when we are hurt, even if it's by a word, even if by its unintentional action. To put that in its proper perspective, to forgive the other, they don't even need to know that most of the time, but we need to have forgiveness for ourselves. We need to be able to say, "It wasn't that important." We need to say, "Either they're wrong in their assessment or if they're right in their assessment, we have no reason to be angry or hurt. We need to take it into our lives and become better."

But we must start with the little things because if we can't forgive the little things that are going in our lives, they become larger. And the large things become uncontrollable and we slip into that area of turning from being hurt to turning aggressive, even towards ourselves or towards the other. We, as Christians, are called to model behavior that says, this is not the right way. This is not the road to travel. It only brings more hurt. It only brings more aggression. And so, we are called to care about the other, to forgive the other, to maintain our health, spiritual health, physical health, mental health. And even from time to time, it requires us to go to the other and say, "You are forgiven."

They may say, "What for?" Or they may say, "I don't care." But it is for us to forgive so that we can heal. And it is for us to be willing to go to the other and ask for forgiveness, to remember and to remind them that I, you, we, are not perfect; that we make mistakes in things that we say and we do Or things we don't say or don't do that can be hurtful. And when we find out about that, to be strong enough to go out and say, "I'm sorry. I need your forgiveness. I want your forgiveness." This is the kind of behavior that we are called to model.

And if we, as a church, are able to do that, then perhaps we can reach beyond the walls and the doors and those who proclaim themselves as Christians, to reach those who are lost, who are trying to figure out what is going on, that they are always feeling hurt, that this hurt turns to aggression, turns to anger and aggression. We are called to proclaim, by word and example, the good news of God and Christ. I think a big part of that, and a good starting place is to offer forgiveness for the little things, so that by the grace of God, they don't become the bigger things.

And when the bigger things are in our lives, to know and understand that we are not alone in dealing with those, that the Holy Spirit, which is given to us in baptism, strengthens us, gives us the courage to go out, to forgive and to ask forgiveness. Jesus began His ministry proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins. You have received that forgiveness from God. It's time for us to offer forgiveness to one another.

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