

When I saw the topic for this morning, Forgiving Disciples, I had to let out a sigh. Not because I don't like or believe in forgiveness, but because it's something that's been weighing heavily on my heart. There's a person I would love to forgive. But also that I'm very disappointed in. I keep waiting for an apology, some sign that they acknowledge wrongful doing, hurtful behavior, but it hasn't come. The person hasn't asked for my forgiveness, but is that, not asking for forgiveness, any reason not to give it? Is not asking for forgiveness any reason for me not to contact the person? Am I, by waiting for an apology, causing even more harm than what was first created?

Forgiveness isn't an easy thing. I use the word thing, because frankly I don't know what forgiveness really is. Yes, it's a verb, it's an action, it's something you do or something done to you. I know some of those actions, some of what it's made of, a list of word descriptors are on the cover of your bulletin, but to summarize those feelings, those actions, and more... well, I can't do it. I can't limit forgiveness with all its complexities like that.

Forgiveness comes in a variety of forms and packages. Some people have been physically abused. Some people have been abandoned. Others have said things they didn't really mean and have lost relationships. And then there are the silly things we cling to, like someone forgetting an anniversary or not doing something the way we think they should.

Is it easy to forgive? To really forgive? Usually, no. Yes, we can easily forgive someone for spilling something or knocking something over and breaking it. Those are the minor things. Those are things that don't really matter in life. I've found it's people's words, people's actions, their presence, or lack thereof, that are the hardest to forgive. Not when a window or your grandmother's favorite china is broken. It's when your heart is broken. When you are let down either by disappointment or by opening yourself up too much. When society lets you down and you become a victim to abuse or neglect. Those are the times that are hardest to forgive. Those are the times we find ourselves drifting alone at sea, our feet not able to reach the ground, no land in sight, not able to see anyone or anything, clinging on to whatever is keeping us afloat, not even knowing which direction we're headed in.

We can stay in our sea of abandonment. Swim out into the ocean of heartache and taste the bitter waters of anger and disappointment, knowing that holding onto the weight of bitterness and resentment will take us down. Knowing that we will never be able to fully enjoy life while holding on to that anger. Why then, while knowing this, is it so hard to let go of our bitterness, of our anger? Why are we so stubborn we're willing to go down with it? Is holding onto our anger worth it?

There are a host of verses about forgiveness in the Bible. Some of them are printed on your insert that Margo/Don read earlier. It seems to be a trend in these verses that we are on the other side of

forgiveness. It's not us needing to forgive, it is us in need of forgiveness. So often we hold grudges against those we think are against us and in the process we lose sight of who we have done wrong. It's easier for us to come up with people who have done us wrong than to come up with people who we have wronged. I'm pretty sure the Bible has this one right, we are a people in need of being forgiven. We are people in need of both offering grace and mercy to people, as well as receiving grace and mercy as it's offered to us.

We as church, practice forgiveness. We as church are a community that offers forgiveness to all people. Just as Christ has forgiven us, we forgive others. We live in community with flawed people just like ourselves. People who mean well, but people who aren't perfect. People, who are human, meaning people who have a bad day every now and then. People who say the wrong thing sometimes, who do the wrong thing sometimes, these are the same people we love. These are the same people who are there for us when we need them. The people who surround us during the crisis of our lives, who embrace us when nobody else will, this is our church, reaching out and before we could even think to ask for forgiveness, the church says, you are forgiven.

To forgive does not mean to forget. It means not holding what you've forgiven against the person anymore. It means extending compassion and love and care even when we don't necessarily want to. It means letting go of our bitterness, anger and hostility, so all that's left is

forgiveness. Creating and sustaining a spirit of forgiveness is much harder to do than say.

Let us, through our actions, tell people they mean more to us than our grudges. Let us show people that they are worthy of living in a community of people who love them, unconditionally. Let us, through our actions, be Christ to one another.

Life is too short to hold onto so much pain, so much hurt. We were created for more than that. We were created to be in community with each other. To love and nurture each other. To forgive as Christ forgave us. Forgiveness affects both parties involved. It releases both parties from the hurt. It acknowledges there is more to life and to that relationship. It means that over time our spiritual discipline of forgiving others will be life giving, to ourselves and those around us. New life and energy comes from both parties. Just as children so easily forgive and continually love, may we be a community that shows people they are worthy of our love, of our grace, that they are a vital part of this body just as they are.

Life was made for love and joy. For laughter and tears. For serving and accepting. For being forgiven and to forgive. My prayer for all of us is to be able to overcome our hurt, our pain and our betrayal. To extend forgiveness, even to those who haven't asked for it. To stay in community with people, loving and caring for them, making sure they know they are worth it. We are each worth taking such a risk. We are forgiven. Amen? Amen.

