

R U Kidding? Be Kind? - Matthew 18:21-35 NRSV

Forgiveness

21 Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. **24** When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; **25** and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. **26** So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. **31** When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. **32** Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. **35** So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

When reading the Bible there are themes, words, examples, and phrases repeated. I almost feel the title of this sermon should be called, “Are you kidding? Forgive?” with a huge question mark. Yet the word kind remains. Both words, forgiveness and kindness are hard to pretty explain. They’re hard to define. They are hard to do. We are reminded all the time to be kind. You might have seen our Norwalk Warriors “Be Kind” shirts last week. That was a prom fundraiser last year and it’s something our schools remind our kids. But when you ask someone what does it mean to be kind? They usually don’t give you a definition, they give you an example. In our

text today Jesus gives us an example of forgiveness, but it's not your basic example. He didn't end the story with the first example of forgiveness, he continued the story to include that whom accepted forgiveness not extending forgiveness to another.

Even with Peter trying to be generous in his question to Jesus, and he really was with the number seven, it was a complete number to them, but even with amidst his generosity, I can picture Jesus saying to Peter, Your question tells me you don't understand forgiveness.

Forgiveness isn't an issue without there being something in need of forgiving. A fault, or in the case of Jesus' example, a debt owed.

The king could see the weight that was on this man, this debt that would have taken the rest of his life and his family's life to payback, and he lifted that burden from him. He freed him. That kind of forgiveness is not everyday forgiveness, that's huge. It's life altering forgiveness.

Rabbi Harold Kushner shared a story, "A woman in my congregation comes to see me. She is a single mother, divorced, working to support herself and three young children. She says to me, "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?" I answer 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 him because he doesn't deserve the power to live in your head and turn you into a bitter angry person. You're not hurting him by holding onto that resentment, but you're hurting yourself."

Forgiveness doesn't remove what's happened or the pain you feel, but it is a healing moment, a healthy moment. Researchers are now saying that people who forgive have greater mental and physical health than their counterparts who do not forgive. Life is too short to get hung up on things of the past. Time moves forward, so let's go forward with kindness, love, generosity, and forgiveness in our lives.

We say the Lord's prayer each week together. Within it we pray for God to ...forgive us...as we also forgive others. It's an act for all of us. No one is

excluded. And here in this space it is so prominent that Jesus gives us that as his example of what we should pray for. In this space it's what we do communally, together.

Being kind is More than simply being a compassionate thoughtful person, it's being able to forgive.

Kindness is much more than simple "Iowa nice". It's more than being respectful or polite. And forgiveness is more than simply saying you're forgiven. It's actually forgiving. It's not holding the grudge. It's not bringing it back up.

When Travis and I were engaged we went through the typical premarital counseling and one of our sessions was about how to fight. Not physically fight, but argue. We were told that at some point in time we'd argue about something. And at some point forgiveness would then come into play. And each time we had a fight the same thing would happen. And if one of us got really mad at the other one, there was no "kitchen-sinking", meaning we couldn't bring back up in a new argument all the things that other person had ever done wrong. We couldn't throw in everything they've done wrong including the kitchen sink. Why? Because that isn't right. Throughout life we're surrounded by others that will need to be forgiven. Sometimes it's something that happens quickly with an immediate, "I'm sorry!" Sometimes no "I'm sorry" comes up. And sometimes the pain against you is so deep it can never be filled with sorries. But as Rabbi Kushner said, don't give anyone that kind of power over you. Take in a deep breath, and choose whichever cheesy song helps you the most, Let It Go, Shake It Off, there's a reason these songs got as popular as they did. Whether we like them or not, there is, oddly enough, very sound advice there. So forgive, even when it hurts, and speak those words of wisdom, Let It Be. Release not only the one that has hurt you, but release yourself to be the healthiest you. It's the kindest thing you can do for yourself. Because as the unknown author said, "In a world where you can be anything, be kind"