**St Martins C3 – September 18, 2022**

**Relate – Forgive**

**Sermon Summary:**

In this series we have acknowledged that in relating to people around us, there are times when we are going to get hurt. Jesus emphasised that we need to respond to being hurt appropriately. That is not easy, and we will certainly need His help to do that. Last week we looked at how we need God’s humility to check our own heart first, as well as the His courage to seek to resolve the issue with the person face to face.

This week we are going to explore the importance of forgiveness. Forgiving others is one of the highest values in the Christian faith. The reason for this is that forgiveness comes from what Jesus did on the cross for us, which is at the very centre of our faith. It is because Jesus forgave us that we have a reconciled life with Him.

**Read: Romans 5:6-10**

Notice in this passage that Jesus extended grace and forgiveness to us, while we were still sinners. While we were still offending Him.

**Read: Colossians 3:12-13**

God’s expectation of His followers is that just as we have RECEIVED forgiveness, we would EXTEND forgiveness. God knows the price we have to pay for forgiveness. He knows it won’t be easy for us, but He will empower us to forgive others, if we are willing.

Forgiveness is our willingness to stop feeling angry or resentful towards someone for an offence or mistake. It is acknowledging the wrong, then choosing to not allow that wrongdoing to define how much grace we will extend to the other person.

1. **Separate the person from what they have done.**

We attach the offence to the person so strongly, that we can’t think of one without the other. But, *“while we (they) are still sinners,”* let us seek restoration of relationship.

1. Acknowledge the wrong and then put it to one side. (Not devaluing what was done. We will come back to this later)
2. How does God want me to relate to this person, if the offence is taken out of the equation?
3. **Embark on the process of releasing them from your anger and resentment.**

Ask yourself: What is it costing me to forgive them? What is it costing me if I DON’T forgive them? At some point you have CHOSEN to be bitter, angry and resentful towards the other person. If you have CHOSEN to hold unforgiveness, you can CHOSE to RELEASE them from it. If we choose to stay resentful, we are agreeing to stay the victim. We are choosing to side with Satan, and side with vengeance and alienation, not God’s side of grace and reconciliation. Let us not set ourselves up as the judge, otherwise we face the same judgement. (Matt 6:14-15) Forgiveness is so important, because God’s blessings flow to us, when we are in that head space. So, let us prayerfully release our offender from our judgement.

1. **Define how you will treat them with grace and respect.**

This is where we explore the issue of trust. Forgiveness doesn’t mean that we will trust them again. It means we will treat them with grace and give them the opportunity to win our trust back.

1. **Address the wrong-doing.**

This is the bit where we turn and look at the wrong-doing that we set aside earlier. Once we have restored a gracious attitude toward the person, we can work on how to address the wrong. Many times, this won’t be able to be resolved and we will have to leave it to God to judge them and their actions. (Rom 12:19-21)

**Questions to ponder and discuss:**

*Do you think God’s expectation on us to forgive others is reasonable? If so, why? Or, if not, why not?*

*Why do we have to separate the person from the offence? What does this achieve?*

*It may take us some time to forgive others. Why is this the case? What are some things we might wrestle with as we go through the process of freeing them from our judgement?*

*What are the spiritual, mental and physical consequences of us holding on to resentment and bitterness?*

*Why is trust a separate issue to forgiveness?*

*How would we know if we have truly handed the judgement of the wrong-doing over to Christ?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Realising our need.**

**Luke 15:17-18**

*‘When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!**I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”*

In this week’s devotions we are going to explore forgiveness in the parable of the prodigal son and the parable of the unmerciful servant. In the passage above, we gain an insight into the thoughts of the offending younger son, who has squandered half the families inheritance. He realises that the best thing to do is to return to his family, but he will need to repent and his father will need to forgive.

One of the issues with forgiveness in relationships is that we don’t know how it will pan out. Many people simply choose to not mend the relationship. After all, it may require some repentance on my part, as well as the potential for more hurt. We also need to note however, that if the younger son had not returned to his father he would have stayed in the squalor. Like the son, we need a revelation of the squalor we are in without God’s grace. Every day let us give thanks to God for His forgiveness. Let’s remind ourselves of the burden that we are putting ourselves under if we hold on to bitterness and resentment towards others.

Take some time right now and thank God for lifting you out of your sin and flooding your life with grace. Determine in your heart to hold that grace in every relationship you are in.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Relationship restored**

**Luke 15:20**

*So he got up and went to his father. ‘But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him… the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.**Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.*

The father knew that his son was burdened with shame. He knew that his son would try and earn his place back in the household. This is normally how the world works. It is a performance/reward system. If you haven’t earned the reward, why should you get it?

The point Jesus is making here, is that God’s Kingdom has a different set of values. A reconciled relationship comes first. The Father immediately reassures the son, that he doesn’t need to earn the father’s favour back. All the love, grace and privilege that the son had previously, is restored to him, because of the restored relationship. Favour is based on identity, not effort.

I expect that there were some conversations about what the son had learnt from the experience in the days following, but the learning and growth wasn’t being built on a foundation of merit, but on the foundation of identity and love. We, like the younger son, need to realise our security in God’s family is more sure than we can ever imagine.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Don’t be an outsider**

**Luke 15:28**

*The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him*

The elder son in the parable stands out in complete contrast to the father. For the elder son, there is no grace for his brother. His brother barely deserves servants wages and certainly not full restoration of sonship.

What Jesus is doing here is a huge plot twist. The younger son is now the one who is found and the elder son becomes the one who is lost.

One of the things Jesus is pointing out here is how easy it is for us to lose our way when we allow jealousy and resentment fill our hearts. When we take on offences our hearts become deceived. We lose God’s perspective and become lost in our selfish desires. We stop extending grace to others and fill our thoughts with what we deserve and what others don’t deserve.

In its rawest form unforgiveness is resentment directed towards God for extending grace to those who we perceive don’t deserve it. The Holy Spirit will plead with us to refocus our hearts on grace, but our stubborn determination to get what we want can over-rule God’s still small voice. Let us be very wary of envy and jealousy. Let us want what is best for those around us. Even those who have sinned. Let us not loiter in anger and bitterness, but enter back into the house of love and grace.

**Thursday’s Devotion – How much it cost**

**Matthew 18:24**

*As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.*

Jesus uses an extreme example to make His point here. No one would ever owe this much money in the ancient world. This would be an unimaginable amount of money. A debt that no one could ever repay, not even a king of a country.

There is a line in a worship song we sing, which says: *“I’ll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross.”* This is good theology and very true. There was a price paid for our sin, that is way beyond what we can ever imagine. But just because it is beyond our imagination, doesn’t mean we dismiss thinking about it and live in denial. We ought to never trivialise our sin, or the price paid for our freedom. We might think it isn’t a big deal, but it is a very big deal.

In this regard, the master in this story, or God in relation to us, only requires two things from us. Two things that are not that hard. Actually they ought to flow quite naturally from appreciating the enormity of grace we have received. The two things are respect and gratitude. Respect for the sacrifice that God has made on our behalf and a life of gratitude lived in appreciation of the debt that has been paid for us. We like the servant in this parable ought to live with a constant appreciation of grace, with that reflected in every relationship and encounter we have with others.

**Friday’s Devotion – Judgement?**

**Matthew 18:32-35**

*‘Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”**In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.**‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’*

There are two big issues that come to mind when we read a passage like this. The first issue is, would a merciful God really do this? The second issue is would we prepared to test it out?

In regard to the second question, why would we want to test it out? When we hold unforgiveness in our hearts towards others, we are stepping away from grace and setting ourselves up to be like God and exercise judgement. The point Jesus is making here is, do you really want to put yourself in that space? How much God will judge you may not be clear, but why risk your eternal security in God’s grace, just for the pleasure of holding on to resentment. (Which has no real pleasure at all)

Now we come to the first question. Is it within God’s nature to judge us so harshly for holding on to our anger and resentment? The way to think about this is considering who has moved? God hasn’t moved and become angry, we stepped away from grace. Therefore, let us forever appreciate the grace we are under and never risk the consequences of moving away from it. Let us always be willing to forgive and never step in the space of judgement.