

Sunday 1st November 2020
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2
Theme: “Forgiveness...”

“Begin by praying for those who have hurt you...”

Introduction:

Forgiveness.... I once preached a sermon entitled “The unnatural act of forgiveness”....

It’s a hard thing to do: to forgive those who have hurt you. It is even an unnatural thing to do, because the most natural reaction to being hurt by someone is to get your own back, or at the very least, not to have anything more to do with them....

Yet, forgiveness is something that God calls us to give to others. God wants us to forgive those who hurt us. What does Paul say in our Bible reading? Paul writes:

Forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ (Eph. 4:32).

Part 1: Of those who repent...

But surely Paul is talking here only about the forgiveness of those who say they’re “sorry” and ask for our forgiveness.... Isn’t he!?

I mean, we can understand God asking us to do that, can’t we!? After all, He’s forgiven us and we’re repented.... We say that we’re “sorry”, every time that we come to church, and every night, well nearly every night.... God forgives us when we say that we’re “sorry”, and, yes, it’s understandable that He wants us to forgive others when they say to us that they’re “sorry”.

And doesn’t it specifically talk in the Bible about people repenting before we have to forgive them!? Didn’t Jesus say in the Bible reading that we had a couple of Sundays ago:

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and *if he repents*, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in one day, and each time he comes to you saying, “I repent”, you must forgive him (Luke 17:3-4; cf. Matt. 18:21-35).

Yes, we can understand if God wants us to forgive those who say that they are sorry.

That’s what He’s done for us, and, sure, it’s fair enough if God wants *us* to forgive people who say that they’re sorry and ask for our forgiveness.

Part 2: Of those who don’t repent...

But what about those people who hurt us and who don’t repent of their action? What about people who don’t say that they’re “sorry” and who don’t ask for our forgiveness? Surely we don’t have to forgive them!!?

Well, let’s listen to what Jesus has to say.

What does Jesus say about how we are to deal with people who hurt us by their words or their actions?

1. Don’t take revenge

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it clear that we are firstly not to take revenge, not to seek to ‘get our own back’. Jesus says there:

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’. But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too (Matt. 5:38-40).

Jesus is saying, “Look, if someone wrongs you, don’t retaliate. Don’t spend your time seeking to get your own back”.

2. Love your enemies and pray for them

Next Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies’. But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and he gives rain to those who are good and to those who are evil (Matt. 5:43-45).

As God’s children, we are to be like God who “makes the sun shine on bad and good people alike” and who “gives rain to those who are good and to those who are evil”. As Paul says in our Bible reading, we are to “imitate God” (*Eph. 5:1*), and God doesn’t discriminate as to who He loves: He shows love to good and bad people alike.

Sure, I know that showing love to those who have hurt us isn’t easy. But it is what God calls us to do as His children.

Can I suggest, if you not already doing this, that you begin by praying for the person or persons who have hurt you. That’s what Jesus says: “And *pray* for those who persecute you”. When you pray for those who have hurt you, or are hurting you, you are beginning to put love for them into action. In prayer, “we go to our enemy, stand by his *or her* side, and plead for him *or her* to God” (*Bonhoeffer, cited by Stott, Christian Counter-culture, p.119*).

One commentator on this passage says:

It is impossible to pray for someone without loving him, and impossible to go on praying for him without discovering that our love for him grows and matures. We feel some love for him in our heart. We must begin to pray for him before we are conscious of loving him, and we shall find our love breaks first into bud, then into blossom (Stott, p.119).

It’s been my experience, too, that *this is true*.

As I've prayed for people who have hurt me, even in a somewhat feeble way, I've found myself learning to love them. Now when I see these people, whom I'm thinking of, God gives me the power to love them.... And I *do* love them, as I see them as God sees them: erring people, people who have been selfish or are being selfish, people who have made mistakes, *people like me*.... ...And people whom God loves despite what they've done, *just as He loves me, despite what I've done*.

By the way, Jesus not only *told* us to “pray for those who persecute” us; he also did it. On his cross, Jesus prayed for his tormentors. While, it seems, the iron spikes were being driven by them into his hands and his feet, Jesus prayed for them, “Father, forgive them! They don't know what they are doing” (*Luke 23:34*).

3. Forgive them

So God calls us not to take revenge, to love and to pray for those who have hurt us, *and, yes, also to forgive them*....

Listen to what Jesus says a little further on, in his Sermon on the Mount. He teaches his followers to pray:

**Forgive us the wrongs we have done,
as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.**

And at the end of this model prayer that Jesus gives to his followers, Jesus says:

If you forgive others that wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father in heaven will not forgive the wrongs you have done (*Matt. 5:12, 14-15*).

There is no condition of repentance here: there is no condition here of a person having to be repentant before we forgive them. We are simply commanded by Jesus to forgive those who have wronged us. Elsewhere, Jesus also makes this clear. In another place, when also talking about prayer, Jesus says:

And when you stand and pray, forgive anything you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done (Mark 11:25).

Again, there is here *no condition of repentance*. Jesus is simply saying: “Forgive those who hurt you, whether they repent or not!”. We are to “imitate God” and forgive those who hurt us. But, hold on a minute, doesn’t God only forgive those who are repentant..... Didn’t we say that before!? Yes, I said that, but in a way to make you think whether *it is* true or not....

And it’s not true!! God forgives us all, period!! He has taken care of our sins through Jesus, and He forgives us all!! His heart overflows with forgiveness. But the problem is: many people don’t *receive* His forgiveness, and don’t re-establish a relationship with God. Indeed, most of the people around us are people who are turning their backs on God and His forgiveness.

God is forgiving towards those who’ve hurt Him. And He calls us, who know His forgiveness and have re-established a relationship with Him, to be similarly forgiving to those who have hurt us.

Can I finish by giving you a couple of very personal examples? I’m not the greatest example of how to respond to those who have hurt you.... For years, I turned my back on my dad, who had hurt me in many ways by his lack of love to me as I was growing up: indeed, my dad wasn’t much of a father....

For years, I stayed away from him, and allowed the hurts to go on building up in me. There came a day, though, when I realised that God was calling me to forgive my dad.

I started praying for him, going to see him, and sending him cards on his birthday, and such like. And as I did so, I found that God gave me the strength and the help to really love him (*cf. my recent acquisition of the letters and that I wrote to my dad*).

Another very personal example is the experience that I had in my first parish. My fellow pastor hurt me very much, and I left that parish angry at him, and very hurt by him. Then I was confronted by God's desire that I forgive him for all the hurts that he had inflicted on me, just as God freely forgives me. So I began the process of trying to forgive him, by praying for him.... And as I did so, I found that I could forgive him, and thereafter whenever I saw him, I acted out that forgiveness: I treated him, as if he hadn't done to me what he had done to me....

Exhortation:

If you're hurting, then, because of what someone has done to you or is doing to you, what message does God have for you *and me* today?

- 1. Don't try to get your own back on them, and don't ignore them.**
- 2. Start praying for them.**
- 3. Show love to them, even if you don't feel like loving them. Our feelings have a way of catching up with our actions.**
- 4. Try to forgive them as God has forgiven you. Act towards them as if the wrong hasn't occurred, or isn't occurring. Sure, go on telling them how you are hurting because of what they have done or are doing, but don't hold what they have done or are doing against them.**

Forgiveness isn't saying that what they've done doesn't matter.... It does matter. But forgiveness is not holding this against the person, and not letting it be a barrier to your relationship with that person.

Conclusion:

May God bless you and me as we “forgive one another, *just* as God has forgiven *us* through Christ”.