

Genesis 50:15-21

Matthew 18:21-35

Romans 14:1-12

“The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

AMEN!

(Sing!)

“These times are so uncertain
There’s a yearning undefined

And people filled with rage

We all need a little tenderness
How can love survive in such a graceless age

The trust and self assurance
that lead to happiness

They are the very things we kill, I guess

Pride and competition cannot
fill these empty arms

And the work I put between us,

You know it doesn’t keep me warm

I’m learning to live without you now

But I miss you, baby

The more I know less I understand

All the things I thought I've figured out,
I have to learn again

I've been trying to get down
to the heart of the matter

But everything changes

And my friends seem to scatter

But I think it's about forgiveness

Forgiveness

Even if, even if you don't love me anymore."

One of my all time favorite songs.

"The Heart of the Matter"

by Don Henley and Mike Campbell.

The song, leads us into the gospel lesson today
because of its focus on forgiveness.

Dear siblings in Christ, hear the good news.

You're going to be tortured! (hah!)

Well, not literally, I hope.

But this call to forgive and the attached parable is going to be torture.

Peter likely thought forgiving someone 7 times was going to be hard enough; generous enough...

but Jesus responded with
"Not seven times, but 77 times."

Some translate it to 70 times 7,
but the number doesn't really matter.

One time is hard enough, 7 might be impossible,
but 77... well, you get my point.

Who can do that!?! That's torture!

Still, it is precisely "the heart of the matter,"
since we are followers of Jesus.

A people forgiven is a people called to forgive,
but this text does not occur in a vacuum.

In a chapter where Jesus dealt with disciples

who wanted to know “who is the greatest
in the kingdom of heaven;”

a chapter where Jesus spoke about
the recovery of one lost sheep, and then how
to work through being wronged by a person
in the church community

(last week’s lesson) - we now have....

“how many times should I forgive, Lord?”

Is seven enough?

When can I stop?

How generous are we supposed to be?

When we pose these questions to ourselves,
while trying NOT to answer them too quickly
or to answer with words that we feel
we are supposed to say,

we get to the recognize how bad
our society is at forgiveness.

We are not good at forgiving!

No, we are good at retaliating! Pushing back!
At “one upping” the other.

You've got a knife,
I've got a gun,
the next one's got a bomb...

and on and on the violence escalates.

It's not hard to imagine a life like that,
in fact it's already here and
that's our REAL torture.

This torture is not good news.

Forgiveness is.

The real torture is violence and seclusion
and guilt and worry about how
the person you retaliated against
will get you back.

The cycle goes on and on. (Pause)

So Jesus, and philosophers like Aristotle,
tapped into teaching people to live moral lives.

Aristotle's ethical vision was focused on virtues
and making them "good habits."

A sort of "good habit" like using your blinker
even when you're alone on the road.

Doing the virtue all the time,
even when no one's watching,
helps it to become a habit that you just
do without even thinking about it.

Can we form a habit of forgiveness
to the point where we do it without
even realizing it?

I think it is something to think about. (Pause)

Still, anyone who has been wronged knows
how hard it is to forgive.

But, it may help to know that forgiveness
doesn't mean the relationship is restored.

Sometimes a wrong is so heinous and brutal
that it is impossible to return to the relationship.

Spousal abuse or child molestation come to
mind as the types of heinous crimes
where reconciliation may never occur.

In situations like these the healthiest action is
to sever that abusive relationship.

Get out and get away, if possible.

Sever the relationship but still work toward forgiveness because it heals the person who's been abused.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting.

Forgiveness means we let go of carrying the anger... because it does eat us up inside.

That is the REAL torture. (Pause)

Jesus' parable also brings to light one of the greatest offenses of the church.

Since forgiveness is a blessing we know well, we must make it our habit to forgive.

Since we proclaim God's forgiveness each Sunday at the front end of worship we can learn to bestow the same forgiveness on others.

It's a sign of God's overwhelming generosity.

In the Lord's Prayer we recite "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

Have we done that?

It is difficult to be generous like that.

Today, is a good day to start the habit. AMEN!

Our ministry minute speaker today is
our very own Barbara Ehlmann.

Barbara is a retired elementary school teacher
and middle school math teacher.

Today, she serves the community as
Board President of KidSafe/Lutheran Social
Services of North Florida.

Let's welcome Barbara.

Thank you for your work and for the work of KidSafe in
protecting children in vehicles. Let's stand and sing.