

Sermon † March 21, 2021  
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There is a story that comes to us from the height of the cold war in the 1960's. It is the story of a Russian family whose dramatic escape from the Soviet Union attracted world-wide attention.

The family's openly Christian beliefs first brought down hatefully-pronounced warnings from Communist party officials. Soon the family's persistent prayer and Bible readings angered the authorities to the point that threats gave way to incidents of violence and persecution. Harassment, repeated interrogations, public ridicule, indecencies, and, ultimately, consignment to Siberia were part of the family's story.

Eventually, they escaped and were safely relocated to a large American city. But, unfortunately, fear is not easily dismissed. It was some time after moving to the United States that one of the young men in the family happened to casually glance out the kitchen window of their humble flat. Every nerve tensed and his body cringed as he observed a strange man driving slowly down the street peering intensely toward the house through binoculars. Instinctively, and shuddering in fright, he rapidly jerked down the window shade. It was a tense moment as the family huddled in the middle of the floor. It was only later that day that the strange man's identity became known. He was a meter reader for the electric company . . . Some things are hard to forget.

But that's how it is with life isn't it . . . there are those things that are not easily forgotten.

- † A trusted friend wrongs you by betraying a confidence.
- † A salesperson misrepresents a product which you have purchased, costing you repeated expense for repairs.
- † Someone at the office mouths an injurious word about you to a superior, resulting in an unnecessary reprimand.
- † Your child charmingly strings together a series of untruths to convince you of his or her innocence for repeated offences. You have taken his or her side only to discover later that you have been manipulated and embarrassed by disbelieving what everyone else had known all along.
- † Your accountant has been gleaning additional earnings from your share of the profits.
- † You labor long and hard on a difficult project only to have someone else receive recognition for the final product, and never mention your name.

The possibilities for injustices are limitless.

- † Has someone pierced your soul at some time or another with a grievous wrong or inequity?
- † Did you forgive them?
- † If you did forgive them, how is it that you still remember the offense now?
- † "Forgiving and forgetting" is a noble motive, but because our memories are not inscribed on erasable-bond paper, the fact remains that some things are not easily forgotten.

And then we are confronted with God's words to us in Jeremiah. So far, we've been talking about human capacities, but Jeremiah moves us into another dimension. And to move forward, it is necessary for us to lay aside everything we know of human reactions to situations in order to really

gather in this beautiful statement:

Says the Lord . . . *"for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."*

Think of it! Our iniquities (wrong-doings) will be genuinely forgiven and not only cast as far as the east is from the west . . . but forgotten. Really this is incomprehensible! Can you imagine forgetting and forgiving forever: It is incomprehensible to us because we so often try to measure the mighty ways of God by our own limited standards.

We think that we can think like God. *"My sin is too great for God to forgive"*, we say. We refuse to forgive ourselves for something which God has already forgiven.

Can we take all of this in? No, we cannot, and because we cannot, it is gloriously wonderful. We might as well attempt to empty the ocean with a thimble as to presume that we can think God's thoughts. *"For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."*

And . . . forgiveness is ours . . . but we must ask for it. When it comes to so many aspects of our faith, we are so faithful. We underline our Bible, faithfully read our devotional books, contribute to the church, and attend the services of worship. But somehow we neglect the very thing which ushers us immediately into the presence of God — confession.

Confession is so often that thing which we lay to the responsibility of the other person. *"Is it I Lord?"* Of course not. It is *they*. It is *they* who have done those things *they* ought not to have done. And if that isn't enough, we often times feel obliged to tell "them" what they've done wrong.

I do have to confess . . . I am a good one at blaming *them*. Our own reluctance to confess is outrageously inconsistent with reason in consideration of the fact that:

Each of us has a need to confess;

We are admitting to God what God knows already;

We stand assured that our sins will be forgiven and remembered no more . . . and yet it's all so hard for us.

A young boy and his sister went to visit their grandmother in the country. Their first day there, the boy, while indiscriminately throwing rocks, accidentally hit his grandmother's pet duck, killing it. Thinking that no one had seen what had happened, he hurriedly buried the duck.

Following supper that evening the grandmother suggested that the boy and his sister clear the table and wash the dishes. The young boy was startled when his sister said, *"I don't feel like doing the dishes grandmother but my brother would love to."* The minute their grandmother was out of the kitchen the boy said to his sister, *"What do you mean you won't do the dishes but I'd love to?"*

His sister whispered, *"I saw you kill grandma's pet duck today and if you don't do everything I say,*

*I'm going to tell her."*

Not only did the little boy do the dishes that night, but also got to do the breakfast dishes while his sister played. At lunch, he was again left alone with the dishes. He was about to confront his sister when, seeing the look in his eyes, she said, *"Remember the duck."* This went on for several days.

Finally, the little boy decided to go to his grandmother and tell her what had happened. She listened to him struggle to explain not only what had happened but how sorry he was.

Then, smiling, she said, *"I was wondering when you were going to tell me because, you see, I was looking out the kitchen window when you did it. I was also wondering how long you were going to let your sister make you miserable. And now that you have told me about it and how sorry you are, of course, I forgive you."*

Our own reluctance to confess is so outrageously inconsistent with reason in consideration of the fact that:

Each of us has a need to confess;

We are admitting to what God knows already;

We stand assured that our sins will be forgiven and remembered no more.

But because of our humanity and the limitations it places on us, we have trouble understanding all of this. We have but dipped a thimble into an ocean. We are in the presence of a vast, grand and wonderful reality: *"For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."*

Let us reach now for a part of this great affirmation that is within our reach, possibly already within our grasp. We see it within the preaching and teaching of Christ. We see it in the Christ of Calvary, praying *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."*

On Calvary, he practiced what he had preached. There were no qualifying "ifs" to his prayer. He knew forgiveness was possible because he had already forgiven his murderers and tormentors in his own heart. He connected with God's power.

*"For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."* What a magnificent thought! Think on it. Reach for it. Then confess and claim it.

