

SERMON - SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 13 2026

And in Anger..., Proper 19 (A) – Matthew 18:31-35

And in anger the Lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do it to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

This is not good news for those of us who have trouble forgiving.

One woman went to her pastor because she had long-term resentments that she held against the men in her life. Her father had greatly favored her brother and had given him the family business. Her brother offered her a menial job in the family business after she divorced. Her former husband was wonderfully successful with a huge income but nicked and dined the child support and alimony paid to her. Her sons resented the divorce and constantly told their mother how much they wanted to go live with their dad.

In short, she was angry and resentful. And what was worse, the reason she was angry and resentful was because she was paying attention, had carefully analyzed her situation-and was right!

Her pastor listened carefully and said, “You are really justified in being angry. What is being angry doing to you?” The woman poured out a litany of pains, health problems, loneliness, and depression.

Forgiveness was offered as a possibility.

The woman was unable, or unwilling, to forgive. The men in her life did not change their way of behaving toward her. Her health and well being continued in a downward spiral, even though she was totally justified in her anger.

We have in us a need for vindication when we are injured. There are disciplines in law and equity for assessing responsibility for injury, for assessing the degree of damage that an injury has done, and for determining payment to restore the damage. But, no one who has ever gone through a difficult lawsuit leaves satisfied.

We even have a bumper sticker that says, “Don’t get mad, get even!”

It may be that the way most of us imitate God is by claiming that “vengeance is ours,” contrary to what God said.

It may be that the torture described in the text is just what happens to us when we refuse to forgive. The choice seems to be whether we will be right and miserable, wrong and miserable, or whether we will be forgiving and happy. There are some very clear words about this from Jesus that we all know: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” or in the familiar translation, “Forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The door to joy and happiness is forgiveness. It seems to work this way. First, when we forgive we join with God in doing one of God’s essential works. Doing the will and work of God brings fulfillment to our lives. Second, forgiveness brings peace to our relationships. Any parent can tell stories of dealing with the injuries, offenses, and disobedience of children. Without forgiveness, children can’t be raised. Marriage, as our institution and way of being, can’t be sustained without mutual forgiveness.

Married folk can’t keep from injuring each other. Without forgiveness the injuries become wounds and the wounds become fatal.

Even more ironic is the reality that most of us can’t change destructive behavior until we find that we don’t really have to change it. One man tells a story: “I did things that betrayed all of my father’s values. He kept forgiving me. I finally did something that was so bad that I knew he would never forgive me and would banish me. He forgave me. I realized that there was nothing that I could do that would make my father stop loving and forgiving me. That realization, knowing that I was loved no matter what I did, meant that I didn’t have to do all the stuff anymore.”

This story is a minor illustration of God’s work in our broken, sinful rebellion. The cross is God’s ultimate act of love and forgiveness. What God did through Jesus was not correct or legal or right. Rather it was pure love. God said to all humanity, “There is nothing that you can do that will end my love for you.” It irritates God when we don’t share the love and forgiveness we have received. So, forgive someone — today!