

PENTECOST 15  
GENESIS 50:15-21  
ROMANS 14:1-12  
MATTHEW 18:21-35  
SEPTEMBER 16, 17, 2017

YEAR A

Which is easier, to forgive others or to receive the forgiveness offered by God and by others? In my experience, each is difficult. Asking forgiveness implies I did something requiring forgiveness. It means I have done something to hurt another person or have sinned against God. Receiving forgiveness is difficult because I must humble myself in order to receive it. God sent Jesus to die on the cross to forgive sins and to provide life. Everything has been accomplished and our sins are forgiven. We hear that assurance each time we gather as the church community. God wants us to receive God's forgiveness and to have our relationship with God and our neighbor restored. Our Bible readings today from Matthew 18 and Genesis 50 are about forgiveness. The reading from Romans 14 is about reconciling our relationships, which usually means forgiveness.

**Genesis 50:16, 17**      **So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him.**

In each text one is offering forgiveness and another either accepts the forgiveness offered or refuses to accept it. We know the story of Jacob and his sons. They were a family with lots of problems. This was a family filled with deception. The brothers sold Joseph into slavery and then lied to their father saying a wild animal devoured Joseph. They continued to deceive even after the death of Jacob. Because of the family problems his brothers sold Joseph into slavery. They sold him and Joseph became a slave in Egypt but he was eventually promoted so that he was in the number two position in the government. Joseph's brothers went to Egypt because of the famine. After a time, Joseph forgave his brothers and provided for them. Although Joseph

forgave them the brothers did not believe it or accept it. They continued to deceive. They believed that Joseph would get even when he had the chance. As we see in this reading from Genesis 50, the brothers went to Joseph with a request they said was from their father. Their father said that Joseph needed to forgive them. There is no way of knowing if Jacob said this or not. It is important to see the reaction of Joseph. He wept when they spoke to them. Could it be that Joseph wept at the lack of his brothers' understanding? It was not Joseph's place to pass judgment but God's. After all those years and after all that happened the brothers are still trying to deceive. Joseph forgave his brothers for all they did but they could not accept the forgiveness or believe that someone could forgive something so terrible. Joseph described how God worked this hardship for good. God worked the slavery and the years of struggle for the good of God's people. I am sure Joseph did not enjoy his time as a slave or his time in the prison. As he looked back on the previous years he saw God's hand of deliverance and protection. It was not God's plan for Joseph to be sold but God worked through the situation to bring something good.

**Matthew 18:21-22** Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" **22** Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Forgiveness often does not come easy. Forgiveness does not come naturally to us. Asking for forgiveness is an act of humility. Asking for forgiveness implies I have done something wrong or have sinned against another person. It is sometimes hard to admit we were wrong. It can also be challenging for us to grant forgiveness. Forgiveness heals relationships by requiring us to let go of a past hurt. It requires us to turn the page and stop being bitter and angry with another person. Forgiveness, seeks to make things right again. Forgiveness is a powerful healing force but also an incredibly difficult thing to receive or share.

Peter asked the question about forgiveness. Jesus said he must 77 times. Some translations say 70 times 7. The idea is that we are to forgive every time. When

I am wronged I must forgive. How can I forgive those that hurt me? How can I forgive those that hurt my family or attacked my country? Jesus did not say it would be easy just that it is necessary for God's people. Forgiveness and justice are two different things. We continue to work for justice and it is all right for us to protect ourselves. Forgiveness means we let the hurts go. Forgiveness means that even as we work for justice we stop seeking vengeance and we allow God to make the judgments. Forgiveness does not erase the memories and it does not pretend that nothing happened but it allows healing in our lives. When we harbor hatred or when we seek to get even our lives are torn apart. We cannot think straight and we continue to live with darkness within us. Forgiving others sets that darkness free and allows us to receive healing in our lives. It allows us to do the work God calls us to.

In Luke 23 Jesus asked that those responsible for the crucifixion would be forgiven. Jesus was without sin. He did nothing wrong and he provided so many things for so many people. He died for you and me yet he asks forgiveness for those we would say do not deserve it. God forgives us our sins even though we do not deserve it. Every time we make our confession repenting of our sin Jesus forgives. He forgives our sins of adultery and he forgives our sins of idolatry. Jesus forgives us for failing to keep the Sabbath day holy and for stealing from our neighbor. No matter what the sin is, God forgives. Since we have been forgiven we also must forgive. There is no sin greater than sins committed against the Lord Jesus. We must always work for justice but we let the Lord be the judge. We put the hurts and darkness aside and take on the Lord's freedom.

Jesus tells Peter to forgive 77 times. He also talks to you and me about forgiving and being forgiven. We trust that God is working a good work among us as we remember and as we minister to those that are hurting. We let God work among us so that we experience life and peace. We follow the Lord as we love our neighbor as ourselves. AMEN