

In this Sunday's readings we hear a lot of talk about forgiveness, compassion and how we are to serve God by living that compassion and forgiveness. We hear about God's mercy towards us and how, in order to receive God's mercy we too must be merciful.

I had a difficult time reconciling what I see in the world today with the readings for this Sunday. We live in a world where there is a president who lies with impunity, who cheats, who hates and who incites hatred among those he is supposed to be leading. I wonder what soldiers might say about having to forgive a man who calls heroic soldiers who have died in battle, "losers" or how the families of George Floyd or Jacob Blake, or any of the many, many people who have been harmed by this president's vitriol and hate, might feel about forgiving him. I'm not sure they'd be keen on forgiving him seventy times seven and yet, that is what we are being called to do.

As I write this, it is September 11<sup>th</sup> and I can't help thinking how difficult it would be for families of those lost that day or for those injured to forgive the radical ideologues who flew the planes into the towers, the Pentagon and the field in Pennsylvania. Imagine being told you have to forgive those men, yet that's what Christ calls us to do. Seventy time seven.

When you think about it, God really is a brilliant psychologist. God recognizes the need for forgiveness and reconciliation for our souls. Anger, hate, resentment – all emotions coming out of a space of darkness do not make us better people. They make us bitter people. They make us sick. They are emotions that are toxic to our souls. Hate and revenge only lead to more of the same.

As I read the readings for this Sunday I was also reminded of Rev. Dale Lang, an Anglican priest at the time his 17-year old son, Jason, was killed in a school shooting in Taber, Alberta. Within hours of his son's

death Mr. Lang publicly forgave the shooter and his family. He talked of God's forgiveness and how it would serve no good to hold on to anger and vengeance. He literally lived what Christ was trying to teach the people of antiquity. Love each other unconditionally which means learning to forgive each other unconditionally. I can't imagine what it must be to lose a child to violence, but I would struggle to do what Mr. Lang did. Yet he did it. He forgave the shooter as did the other student who was shot and survived. Both spoke of the damage that hanging on to anger and hate does. In addition, Mr. Lang spoke of the shooter and how he had been tormented and bullied by his peers and that he too was a victim. He wasn't condoning the act of violence but he was illustrating what happens if we don't forgive, if we don't move on from the anger and hate. Seventy times seven.

I remember accompanying the family member of a child who had been murdered a few years previously. The family member looked drawn and anxious and hadn't slept well since the child's death. This person

told me “I will never forgive him for what he did.” We talked about the spirit of the child who was all about unconditional love, joy and whose little personality gave so many people happiness. We talked about what hate does to a person – we talked about what hate was doing to that person inside. They said they’d try to forgive but they weren’t sure they if they could. I met this family member several years later. This person looked at peace and didn’t have the same mask of torment on their face. I mentioned that they seemed to be doing better and the person replied to me: I forgave him. I went to jail and I told him I forgave him and that I was going to let go of the hate I had for him. I’ve slept like a baby ever since. As you can well imagine, that wasn’t an easy thing for this person to do. They were filled with anger and wishes of vengeance on the person who murdered their loved one. However difficult, they found their way to the lightness of letting go, and of forgiving and of finding peace. Seventy times seven.

C.S. Lewis wrote an essay about forgiveness. In it he said:

“We believe that God forgives us our sins; but also that He will not do so unless we forgive other people their sins against us. There is no doubt about the second part of this statement. It is in the Lord's Prayer, it was emphatically stated by our Lord. He doesn't say that we are to forgive other people's sins, provided they are not too frightful, or provided there are extenuating circumstances, or anything of that sort. We are to forgive them all, however spiteful, however mean, however often they are repeated.”

I think that's the whole point of forgiveness – it's not easy. It's sometimes very, very difficult to do and there are some don't find their way there, but God is telling us there is great peace and fullness of life in forgiveness...so, today as we say the Lord's prayer, let's really think about what the words

“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

invite us to do. To let go of the darkness of hurt, anger, hate and to embrace the light of forgiveness, peace and love. Seventy times seven.

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