

Title: "Invitation to Forgive"

Text: Matthew 18:15-35

This summer on the Sundays that I am preaching, we are looking together at "Invitations From God."

Last week we looked at Jesus' invitation to come to him to find rest for our souls.

- And we saw that Jesus was actually inviting us to change our lives by taking off the yokes of bondage that have been burdening us,
- and by putting on His yoke, His new way of life, which he said we would find to be easy and light.
- His new way of life would bring rest for our souls.

Well, one of the "yokes" that we often wear that Jesus would like us to take off because it is too heavy for us to bear, -is the yoke of "un-forgiveness."  
-Un-forgiveness.

When we are hurt by someone, and just can't forgive them,  
-it becomes a burden that weighs down our souls.  
-The hurt and anger festers into resentment and bitterness and hate.  
-And we are the ones the hurt is eating up and wearing out.

Jesus' invitation to us today is an invitation to forgiveness.

Let's look at what Jesus says to His disciples in Matthew 18:15-35.

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Jesus says, "If someone sins against you, go and talk to him or her about it, just the two of you."

And that sounds so simple, doesn't it?  
-But the "being sinned against" part is never simple,  
-and the going to the person to talk about it is never easy, is it?

And that's because what needs to happen in the interaction between the two people is forgiveness.

- And forgiveness is hard, hard, hard.
- And it's fragile, and it's complicated, and it's costly.

And so Peter nicely speaks up for all of us, and says, "Lord, how many times do we have to do that?"

And Jesus basically says, "A lot. In fact, more than a lot."

-Jesus says, "Again, and again, and again, and again."

-70 X 7 is a Hebrew way of saying, "It never ends."

As long as people keep sinning against us, we will need to keep on forgiving.

-And that just doesn't seem right, does it?

Or maybe it seems right as a concept: we would all probably agree that "forgiveness" as a concept is a good thing.

-But that's only until we actually have someone sin against us and hurt our feelings,

-and then forget forgiveness, we want justice!

-We want them to pay for what they did to us.

-And if they hurt us bad enough, we want revenge.

And the idea of forgiving the person seems ludicrous.

-In fact it seems unjust and unfair!

-Forgiving the person seems like you are letting him or her get away with what they did.

-It seems like you are being a doormat and letting yourself get walked on.

-It seems like you are just avoiding conflict.

And that might be true if all you are doing IS avoiding conflict.

But notice, that is not what Jesus is talking about here.

-That is not what he is inviting us to.

He is actually inviting us to something radically different than conflict avoidance and suppressed anger and hurt.

He is inviting us to forgiveness.

-And the goal is both rest in your own soul and reconciliation with the other person.

-You don't want the hurt you feel to eat you up, and

-you don't want to avoid the other person for the rest of your life.

“No,” Jesus says, “Go to the other person, and deal with the issue.

-Go with the intent to forgive, and go with the goal of real reconciliation.”

But here’s the really radical thing about what Jesus is inviting us to:

-He says, “Even if there is no reconciliation with the other person, you still need to forgive.”

-You still need to process the hurt before God, and let it go.

-You need to release it by forgiving the other person.

And how in the world do we do that?

-Well, that’s what this crazy parable is about.

-Jesus is explaining to Peter why it is that we need to go on forgiving people who sin against us,

-even if they keep on doing it.

-even if they won’t repent and ask forgiveness.

-even if the other person short circuits the reconciliation by not wanting to be reconciled with us.

And so Jesus tells this story to describe in action, the kind of forgiveness he is talking about.

-In the story there is a kingdom and a king, and there is a servant of the king who is in debt to his King for 10,000 talents.

-In Jesus day that was literally millions of dollars.

-It was an exorbitant amount of money, and there’s no explanation at all as to how or why a servant of the king would get into that kind of debt.

-But it’s a parable, OK? And Jesus is making a point.

-This servant owes his king a whole boatload of money!

-And when the King bring him in to settle up and get paid back, the servant can’t possibly pay back what he owes.

-So he begs the king for mercy and for more time to try and come up with the payment.

And for some other inexplicable reason the King takes pity on him, and cancels the debt!

-Do you hear that? He cancels the debt!

He didn't just give the servant more time to try and pay it off.

- In fact, the king and the servant both knew there was no way the servant could ever pay off that kind of debt.

So it was unbelievable that the king would simply write off the debt as a loss to himself,

- and give the servant a clean slate.
- No jail time, no community service, no indentured servitude.

The king cancels the debt and lets the servant go free.

That's what makes the second part of the parable so disturbing.

- That same servant then goes out from the king's presence, and finds one of his fellow servants who owes him 100 denarii.
- My friends, 100 denarii was like \$10 in Jesus' day.

But this same servant grabs his fellow servant and demands his \$10.

- He shakes the guy up, and refuses to listen to his plea for a little more time to pay it back.
- In fact, he's going to drag the guy down to the police station and have him thrown in jail for a measly \$10.

Except that word gets back to the king about what had happened.

- And then the king was furious with the first servant.
- He says, "You wicked bum! I just forgave you a multiple million dollar debt that you owed me, and you then go out and beat up a guy who owes you \$10. "You're the one going to jail now," says the king. "And you won't get out until you pay me every last cent you owe me."

Jesus says, "That's how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Wow! That's a sobering thought, isn't it?

- But that's the whole point of the parables Jesus tells.
- He wants to wake us up to the realities of God's kingdom.

And in this case he wants to wake us up to see two important things about forgiveness:

1. First is the dire consequence of not responding to his invitation to forgive.

Forgiveness is serious business with Jesus.

-It's not a little add-on to a life of walking with Jesus:

-one of those ala carte items that you can take or leave depending on how you feel.

-No, for Jesus forgiveness is at the core of a life of walking with him.

"This is how my heavenly father will treat you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

And back in Matthew 6 after Jesus has taught his disciples to pray what we call "The Lord's Prayer,"

-he says to them: "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

See what I mean? Jesus is dead serious about this.

2. But the second thing Jesus is describing for us in this parable is the means by which we go about forgiving others who have hurt us.

We do it by reminding ourselves how much we have been forgiven.

When Peter asks Jesus how many times we are supposed to forgive people who hurt us,

-and Jesus says 70 X 7 times.

-for Peter that sounds completely impossible!

-He thought he was being really godly by suggesting 7 times.

-That seemed like a huge amount to Peter.

-So when Jesus says, "How about 70 X 7!" well that is just completely mind-boggling.

-And it still is for us today, isn't it?

There's no way we can keep on forgiving like that....  
...unless we are reminded again and again of how many  
times God has forgiven us.

Ooohhh, yeah.

- Like the servant in the parable, we have been forgiven millions of times.
- So many times that we could never pay off our debt.
- And if you're like me, I keep adding to my debt every day.
- And I keep having to receive God's mercy and forgiveness every day.

And so Jesus asks me, "So Paul, how is it possible that you wouldn't forgive someone who sins against you?"

- That's the dynamic that enables us to forgive.
- It's not the other person's repentance.
- It's not our own ability to let go of the hurt.
- It's not about our skill at negotiating a reconciliation.
- It's really about our willingness to be reminded of our own sinfulness.
- And then in light of all the forgiveness and mercy we have received from God our King,
  - we ask for His help to treat our brothers and sisters with the same kind of mercy he has treated us.

That's the life that Jesus is inviting us to.

- It's a life in which receiving God's forgiveness and mercy is a daily experience for us,
  - and a life in which extending that grace and mercy to others is a daily experience for us.

That's why we go to our brother and sister when they sin against us.

That's why we want to learn to welcome our brother and sister when one of them comes to us and tells us how we have hurt them.

We want to take off the yoke of un-forgiveness that so easily weighs us down.

- We want to put on the yoke of Jesus, and learn to forgive as he has forgiven us.

And my friends, that doesn't mean we are condoning the sin or sweeping it under the rug.

- It means we are actually processing the sin and naming it, but dealing with it in the way God has dealt with our sin.

And this also does not mean that if you are living in an abusive situation,

- where you are being physically or verbally or emotionally abused on a regular basis,
- that you should just forgive and keep on living with the abuse.

No, there are times when we need to remove ourselves from abusive situations.

- Where we need to put up boundaries to protect ourselves.
- We will still need to work through the process of forgiving the abuser, (and that can be quite a process),
- but it doesn't mean that we have to go on living in the situation.

Well, as we come to the communion table today,

- we are reminded again of how forgiveness is at the very heart of our faith.
- We were the ones who literally "abused" Jesus.
- We humans mocked him, scorned him, verbally and physically abused him, and nailed him to a cross.

He died asking his heavenly Father for our forgiveness.

- And he died actually taking the punishment that our sins deserved upon himself.
- And even now Jesus bears the scars on his hands, feet and side in heaven,
- as he sits at the right hand of the throne of God interceding for us.

He is the One who invites us to forgiveness.

- And he knows full well how costly it is; how complicated it can be; how painful the hurt can feel.
- But he asks us to remember how much we have been forgiven; how great our debt is that was cancelled.
- He asks us to forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven.