

Forgiveness: Once more and once more with feeling..

Matthew 18:21-35

Last night when I had written a few pages for today's reflection...I still knew it wasn't it! I am hopeful what I re-thought and re-did makes more sense! If not...taking on the theme for today's reflection...please forgive me:

Richard Holloway, the former Primate of the Episcopal Church in Scotland ends his book, *Looking the Distance*, with a perspective on how we should both live and die. He writes: *So, we should live the fleeting day with passion and, when the night comes, depart from it with grace.* For Richard the day speaks of our life and the night our dying. Live with PASSION, he asserts and die with GRACE.

There is something in those lines which speaks to me about the lesson we just heard from Matthew. I am moved to suggest that the biggest block to living life passionately (with all our heart, mind and spirit) is our withholding **forgiveness from others** and the biggest block to dying with grace (accepting death as a gift to continuing on into eternity) is our withholding **forgiveness from others. And the other can be ourselves.**

Many of us carry hurts that come down to us from generations of pain from institutional injustices and wrongs and at the other end of the continuum, we carry wounds from those dearest to us inner own lifetime—families and friends. And while I scripture focuses on the latter (families and friends) we need to at least acknowledge that the human race and that means all our institutions including our church, must address the pain we carry from either inheriting or being current victims of cultural genocides of one form or another. Are we German, French, Polish, Italian, Egyptian, Irish, South African...Aboriginal?...All wrongs, that our people **have done** or that have **been done to** our people need forgiveness. For they are rooted in the misuse of power.

A brief example: The Church of England (Anglican) has long been tied to the government of England and still is in some ways. And, so are many other forms of Christianity and other religions tied to the government/political institutions of many countries!

When the Revolutionary War between England and the Colonies in New England was ended, the Anglicans in the new country, called the U.S.A. wanted to re-establish ties with the "mother church" in England, for many were still Anglicans in their minds and hearts. Well, the Parliament in England was still smarting from defeat from that former colony and for several years put off recognizing the they one elected as a Bishop (Seabury had been elected in Boston, Mass.). So eventually Seabury went north to Scotland, which for obvious reason had become the Episcopal Church of Scotland and ten non-juring Bishops there (all

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of the Scottish Bishops) ordained Seabury and so the Episcopal Church of the United States was born and eventually acknowledged by the Anglican Church in England. When it came time for the oldest Diocese in the U.S. to celebrate its 200th anniversary in Boston, Massachusetts, I was present when the then presiding Primate of Scotland gave the opening address to representatives in Paul Revere's Old North Church and he said, in his Scottish accent: *I bring you greetings from your mother in Scotland, for the Church in England had paid more attention to Acts of Parliament, than to the Acts of the Apostles!*

This story is not to revisit that issue but to point out that we all can carry/in our hearts the his/her story of our race, cultural, and part of our work is to shed. It needs work in the fertile and critical ground of "truth and reconciliation" but that is not my focus here today but an acknowledgement.

And a second codicil (modifies everything as in a will) is that forgiveness does not mean that if you are being abused you must continue to forgive your abuser and subject yourself to ongoing victimization. Last week's lesson (Matthew 18:15-20) addresses the need to have that faced head on and to get help from the church/community in that process.

Let us today look at ways we can do something on a personal level so we do not carry forth issues that have negatively touched us in our daily lives. And in order to take the perspective that Matthew's gospel is presenting today, that we are called to forgive others not only daily basis but in an on ongoing basis and Jesus says 77 times, which represents infinity.

I think we have to start with ourselves.

As a side note, if it really happened this way, as Matthew writes, I wish I could have seen Peter's face when he said, I think proudly to Jesus, "Do I have to forgive another member of the church seven times," citing the perfect number in the Bible, probably believing he is was right. Jesus replies, "not seven but seventy times seven." which means eternally..over and over. Once again Peter misses the mark and is a useful foil for us too!

"Forgiveness needs to become not an action after the fact...but an attitude," Muller wrote, and "an attitude which you enter each moment!!

Take for example what we call the Lord's Prayer. When we pray today, as we do each Sunday, the prayer that Jesus taught, we need to listen to our words very closely, especially when we come to this part:

*Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us...*

There is a less than subtle suggestion here isn't there:

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—what stands out to you: plural noun us/we are petitioning for others too...and perhaps even ALL others...even those we are in the outs with...did you realize that???

—what do we say next “as we forgive those who sin against us.”.

conjunctive: as

Each time we pray we are saying *just as I forgive..I want to be forgiven...*

are you sure? do you have a clean slate with others in your heart?

That is our work, isn't it, to make that really true—to let go of those thoughts, memories or daily issues with others so we can live vitally and with enthusiasm—to live the life we are called to have.

I think Eric Hoffer is right when he wrote:

*The remarkable thing is that we really love our neighbour as ourselves, we do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant towards others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. We are prone to sacrifice others when we are ready to sacrifice ourselves.*

Allowing ourselves to be forgiven is important. Too many of us only recall the should have, would have, could have in our lives...the road not take, the wrong turn and there are memories that come up when we say to ourselves (or at least I do to myself) *What a duffus you were Linda!* Sometimes a memory of several decades comes up and some from just yesterday.

That is the time to do what???

Stop and listen for a few minutes to the voice within and invite God into that moment too and say... *a mistake was done there...I am sorry help me to forgive myself for not realizing what was happening, for not walking away* ...whatever!

I remember getting an email from a former partner after several years had past and he asked me to forgive him. Of course I did and probably already had..but guess who I hadn't forgiven..ME..*why did I stay so long? why was I playing the "saviourette role"....*Letting go is liberating and allows you to do what Richard Holloway wrote: to live your life with passion.

You know, that in prayer you can even forgive those who are not walking this earth today...

And one key way to rid yourself of that extra load you carry is to work on and giving thanks for whatever you learned or whatever in those times was good. Even offering a blessing to the “other” is a healing act.

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Jesus lived a life laced with forgiveness every step of the way. He knew whereof he spoke. How else could he offer such compassion for those who sought to snuff out his life; to his followers who betrayed and denied him? He knew he was loved...by the Creator of all who also loves us  
He knew he was loved...by those few who did stand by him to the very end  
And he knew he loved all: from those on crosses next to him and to those who would follow his way in the years to come.

Let us be able to say at the end of the day or the end of a service out loud or inner hearts...Let us go forth into the future, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit...  
the Spirit that surrounds us  
the Spirit that is within us  
That is the Spirit that loves all and forgives all. *All my relations*