

September 13, 2020

Jesus talks a lot about forgiveness and Peter listened closely. And Peter has a good question, how many times should he forgive someone? He wonders if seven times is enough? Seven is a good and Holy number... But Jesus says, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." Today, let's do some reflecting with forgiveness, what is Jesus talking about?

Quick story... Our daughter, Jo lives in Seattle. About seven months ago on a Saturday afternoon she was sitting in her living room reading, when she heard a car alarm go off, and she looked up-- only to see her own car being driven away. It was stolen! In broad daylight!

They called the police, and while the police thought they might have seen it, the car wasn't recovered. Jo and her husband borrowed a car from one of the relatives. And when they were driving home from picking it up, they saw their own car, the stolen car in a grocery store parking lot. And since they had the keys, they just jumped in and took their own car back!

Well, they reported that to the police, and the police were sympathetic, but told them they shouldn't have done that! Because, apparently, it might have been dangerous... And I imagine it could have been. It could have been a trap...

And then, about a week later, someone stole their car a second time! They were going someplace and the car was just plain missing! You just can't make this stuff up! So, again they called the police and reported the car was stolen. Jo was a little miffed!

Well, this time, the police found the car, it was parked on the street and just a few blocks from their home. So, a second time they got their car back... This time the police told them they should park the car behind the house where it was more secure, and use a steering-wheel club to prevent it happening a third time...

I told Jo she should leave a message on the dash saying, "if you steal my car again, please leave some gas money in the arm rest." She was not amused!

Now think about it... It would be hard to offer forgiveness to someone who stole your car, that's an expensive ticket... It would be even harder if it happened a second time... Now imagine, up to seven times? I don't know... at some point it would almost be meaningless. If there's no change of heart, why would you keep forgiving someone?

And so, Peter wonders, really, are we to forgive someone up to seven times? That seems like an awful lot, almost like an invitation to be taken advantage of... Peter is genuinely trying to figure this out...

And Jesus responds that we are not to forgive seven times, but seventy-seven times! In other words, it's not something that can be measured because it's a matter of the heart.

Jesus then tells a story that can be pretty much summarized by saying if you don't forgive, well, don't expect to be forgiven. Again, it's that spiritual principle, that what goes around, comes around... And the good news today is that through Jesus, what goes around is love and forgiveness...

Another story... Kris and I drove out to Willmar on Monday to see my folks. We took highway 12, west of the Cities, it goes through a lot of smaller towns. Every once in a while, there's an extra passing lane...

Well, we were heading into Cokato, and there was a fifth wheel trailer in front of me. There also happened to be an extra passing lane, so I pulled out to pass and quickly realized the two lanes were going to merge again. So, I stepped on the gas to get past the trailer... And, of course, there just so happened to be a state trooper right there, and right then! And I got pulled over...

The trooper walked up and I gave him my license and insurance card... He was really young, and my heart went out to him... I like these guys... He asked if I knew how fast I was going, and I said, "well, maybe I hit 75?" He gave me credit for being honest and said I was going 71.

I learned many years ago, that when you're in the wrong, the best thing you can do is admit your fault. So, instead of making excuses, I owned that I was guilty, I confessed that I'd made a mistake. I told him I shouldn't have been so eager to pass the trailer. It was the wrong thing to do!

And after a while, the officer was almost making excuses for me, he admitted the guy driving the fifth wheel was a little clueless, because he didn't pull over when he was supposed to, and that he understood the merging situation...

The officer then asked about my driving record... I hemmed and hawed a little, Kris had enough of me and said, "It's spotless." I offered that he could go and check. He said, "You can count on it." He came back quickly and said, "Todd your record is spotless, I'm just going to give you a verbal warning to slow down."

He was a wise young man, and I appreciated his judgment. He forgave the ticket, but not without the warning to slow down. And truth is, the law is there to protect me and others. And I get that... And the officer knew I knew it... I'd confessed it...

You know, I think he genuinely appreciated my honesty and respect... He was moved to be compassionate... Forgiveness happens in the heart, first. It is not something to be counted because it's deeply relational. And I know it might seem strange, but I felt like the officer and I connected.

When Jesus says we should forgive seventy-seven times, he's kind of saying that if you have to count it, you kind of miss the point. Forgiveness is not a commodity, it's a relationship...

It's the Body of Christ all together, it's the communion of Saints. We are blessed to be a blessing to one another... And in this election year, and amidst this pandemic, we need to be more forgiving of one another, than ever before...

And I believe I'm seeing it... So many of us in this community are different from one another, and yet, we are being loving, kind and gracious people... Forgiving one another, it's the air we breathe. God forgives us, we forgive each other, what goes around comes around.

And thanks be to God... Amen.