



Message Transcript

6th September 2020

Exodus 12:1-14 | Psalm 149 | Romans 13:1-10 | Matthew 18:10-20

Forgive Again, Lord?

Greetings all, it's so wonderful to be able to celebrate with you Father's day, I thank Rev Melinda so much for asking me to give the Challenging message that Holy scripture brings to us on this special day for us dad's!

I did some quick research to find the origin of Father's Day.

In Australia, Father's Day is celebrated on the first Sunday of September.

History books, mention the Western European tradition dating back to 1508, linking it to Saint Joseph's Day, 19 March.

And from good old Dr Google, in the US, the origins show the first known Father's Day service occurred in Fairmont, West Virginia, on July 5, 1908, after hundreds of men died in the worst mining accident in U.S. history.

Grace Golden Clayton, the daughter of a dedicated reverend, proposed a service to honour all fathers, especially those who had died, however it took a long time and for acceptance, due to, and I quote...

Men viewed it as similar to Mother's Day, which was popular with florists; fathers didn't have the same sentimental appeal. As one historian writes, they "scoffed at the holiday's sentimental attempts to domesticate manliness with flowers and gift-giving, or they derided the proliferation of such holidays as a commercial gimmick to sell more products—often paid for by the father himself."

So, let us pray for all us Dad's,

Heavenly Father,

*you entrusted your Son Jesus, the child of Mary,
to the care of Joseph, an earthly father.*

*We ask you to bless all fathers
as they care for their families.*

Give them strength and wisdom,

*tenderness and patience;
support them in the work they have to do,
protecting those who look to them,
as we look to you for love and salvation,
through Jesus Christ our rock and defender. Amen*

Today's Gospel is part of the discourse in St Matthew's gospel beginning in Chapter 18, in Capernaum when the disciples come to Jesus and ask him about who is the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus speaks to them on the way they should relate to one another.

So in this light, how do we understand the Gospel reading today?

What do you think?

— Is it about rules or relationships?

— Is Jesus giving us rules to live by, or putting relationships first, over, well, just about everything else in our life as Christians?

If the former, then we have a rather neat little formula for maintaining a semblance of order in the Christian community.

Someone offends you, confront them. If that doesn't work, try an intervention. If that fails, cut them off and kick them out.

If nothing else, it's at least straight forward, which is perhaps why some Christian groups have read this passage this way.

However, if the latter, then we've got a much more challenging, but also more interesting, interpretation ahead of us.

What if Matthew isn't simply setting up the rules of engagement but rather is trying to build authentic Christian community?

What if the point is less about having a code of conduct to follow and more about regaining a brother or sister?

What if Matthew's major concern isn't actually settling disputes but creating an environment where Christ's presence continues to bring forgiveness, healing, and joy?

The verses immediately before this passage detail God's delight in gathering back those sheep that have strayed and the injunction to beware despising others, even those who seem of little account to us.

Then the verses that follow today's reading, set a new standard for forgiveness, first multiplying Peter's sense of appropriate forgiveness beyond imagination and then suggesting that our ability to forgive others may be the key determinant in whether we ourselves are forgiven.

Because if we think about it, going to someone with our concern or grievance is a lot harder than talking behind his or her back.

Bringing others to listen closely to what is said a lot more courage than posting something on Facebook.

And working out our disputes as a community together rather than simply dispensing judgment can be really, really hard.

This more relational approach, to hearing and heeding Matthew's counsel, opens up other ways to read and understand the rest of the passage as well.

Because suddenly loosing and binding, may perhaps not be promises of unlimited power, but instead invite extreme caution before setting anything in stone as the way we regard others on earth.

Seeking agreement with others in the community is not a formula to force God's hand to grant us what we want, but instead is the promise that when we Christians come together to discuss, listen for, and discern God's will, nothing is out of our reach.

The assurance of Jesus' presence is both a reminder that what we say and do together, is always said and done in the presence of our Lord, and a promise that the hard work to which we set ourselves is not done alone, but always with Jesus' presence and assistance.

We know that authentic Christian community is powerful and healing, and a tremendous witness, that makes the people outside say; see how they love one another, or in the words of that hymn, "they'll know we are Christians, by our love, by our love, yes they'll know we are Christians, by our love"

This must be preserved, as it repeats itself in Christian life, the life-style of Jesus himself: "You must love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34)

There is so much that is challenging in our world just now –

From COVID-19, loss of income, unknown future of job security, displays of hate, from injustice to intolerance, the world desperately needs us, the church, to be the Body of Christ.

As verses 18 & 19 tell us, when we grow weary following the path Jesus set, perhaps we can remind each other, that we have Jesus' promise that each and every time we try, He is there with us, teaching us in the way of love, urging us on, forgiving us, and sending us out to be agents of reconciliation and peace, accompanying us wherever we may go.

Amen