



As we forgive those who sin against us

14th March 2021

4th Sunday of Lent

Welcome all, it is so wonderful to be encouraged by Reverend Melinda to give today's message as we enter into the 4th week of Lent.

Today, we continue on our journey of reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, with the verse ***"forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sins against us."***

I would like to share with you the powerful personal witness of my Kairos Inside experiences, of this verse from Holy Scripture.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we begin our Lenten journey in 2021, may the words I speak today, of forgiveness of others, challenge us in our daily lives and encourage and help us to grow in wisdom, love and service as your servants in this community. Amen

I have been involved in this life changing Ministry of Kairos, since 1997, and along with our guests, "the boys in green", have learnt first-hand about forgiveness of self, and God's gracious desire to forgive us, and our need to forgive ourselves and others and to accept God's forgiveness.

Many people. Either side of the prison fence, have the tragic understanding that there is a limited number of times that God will forgive!

Look at St Peter! Who is led to wonder just how generous he has to be. He thinks that he is being very generous in suggesting that he might forgive his brother or sister seven times. Seven is a perfect number, thus Peter is not being mean.

Have a think about this, **suppose, we only had seven chances of being forgiven our sins in our lifetime? Supposing we were to confess our sins, and keeping no record of them as one does, were told: "Sorry, mate, we've been keeping a record of your sins and according to the records, you've used up your quota." So, sorry, you knew the rules, no forgiveness for you, ever!**

Wouldn't that be frightening! Destroying hope!

As Christians, we have the great assurance that every single time we genuinely repent we can renew our relationship with God?

Many of the men in prison that we meet through Kairos, believe they cannot be forgiven & many haven't forgiven themselves. They haven't known that God doesn't keep a record of our sins, they haven't asked for God's forgiveness, for what they have done. When they come to understand the Christian message on forgiveness, their lives are changed, transformed to give them peace, hope and a future. Wow!
Praise God!

The importance of forgiving others is clearly a major part of Jesus' life and teaching. It comes up over and over.

So what is forgiveness?

First of all, it is something you do. It is not just a change in feelings about another person. Forgiving others means giving their imperfect humanity to God and admitting that beginning the long forgiveness process cannot be done without God's help.

We humans like to hold on to our anger, but with God, we can begin letting go of our anger and start to free ourselves. It now becomes our decision to stop treating another person as though they owed you something.

It is our promise made to God to stop blaming someone for something. Failure to forgive can destroy our lives. It takes all of our energy we might have for something good and eats away at us. Forgiveness is a choice, a decision which may have to be made over and over again until the process is completed.

But, in the end, for our own sake and in obedience to Jesus whom we love, we make that decision to forgive. It doesn't necessarily mean that our feelings change. We may make the decision to forgive even when we are boiling with anger. God knows...

God can change our hearts about the people we hold in un-forgiveness. I know that because He's changed mine. Let me explain.

In our Kairos program we ask the team and our guests to do this task, on their own, on the second day of the 4 day course.

We ask them, if you have anyone whom you hold in un-forgiveness, it could be yourself, your father, your mother, your brother, -the arresting officer, your solicitor...

If you hold any of these people in un-forgiveness, we ask them to write their names down on the sheet of paper we pass out, and to put this list some place secure and not on your table. No one else should see these names except you. As more names come to you over the next day, add them to this page. Keep the sheet handy and as names come to you, add them to the list.

As we said before, no one else will see this list except you and God, so don't be afraid to write down the names which come to you

Tomorrow in Chapel we'll burn those lists, at our chapel service. We will have a large metal bucket with a cleansing fire burning in it! We will ask you, if you are prepared to forgive those people on your list, to tell Jesus you do so, and then to come forward, pause for a moment with a short prayer, offering up your names, then "screw up" your page of names and throw it in the bucket.

As all the lists are incinerated, one of the clergy will come forward and speak briefly about forgiveness, and then we will ask God to accept our forgiveness and to forgive us for our un-forgiveness.

All present do this, the looks on the faces, many with tears in eyes, many grown men, with an arm around a mate's shoulder, expresses the life giving freedom of forgiveness! I've seen men in green come up and comfort team, including yours truly!

God is love and our lives are intended to be a journey toward that perfect love. Life is a kind of proving ground in which our ability to love is tested and strengthened.

We are called to be Christ's body, to be a healing, forgiving community, to restore His broken and fragmented body. This means to forgive those who have hurt us... and to ask forgiveness from those whom we have hurt, too.

It can be risky doing this. It requires becoming vulnerable to the other person, and when we become vulnerable we sometimes get hurt... but the person whose closest friend is Jesus can't get hurt the way a person whose closest friend is himself/herself can be hurt.

We need to learn to see people as God intends them to be. God always sees us in the fullness, which is being brought about in us by the action of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

God loves the person I hate with the same love He has for me. I can't love the person I hate with my own resources, but when I forgive that person and pray for good for them and ask God to fill me with divine love and compassion for that person Jesus can and does make it possible for me to love. (add KI 1 witness)

So what does this scripture passage say to us today?

Well, firstly, we can't earn God's forgiveness, but we can His peace and the blessings that God gives us, and sharing it with others by the quality of our own forgiveness.

It is said that a person who does not forgive has never really experienced God's forgiveness. The household of God both experiences and dispenses the love of God in its forgiveness and compassion.

Secondly, there is no real proportion between the offence of our sins against an all-holy God and those made against us by others.

Every time we say the Lord's Prayer we commit ourselves to this: **"Forgive us our sins JUST AS we forgive those who sin against us."** This is indeed a courageous prayer to make. Ask ourselves....

Do we really mean what we say?

Do we even think about forgiveness when we pray it?

Amen