

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

If you were at Little Fork Lutheran last Sunday, you heard me say “Forgiveness is the first option for us because we are forgiven.” I meant what I said, but I’ll tell you that even as a pastor it’s sometimes hard to do, for one thing, it causes me to engage in self-reflection at a moment when I don’t really want to do that. I do it anyway, and I can tell you that I don’t think there’s anyone waiting for my forgiveness, and I don’t think there’s anyone I can’t forgive, but occasionally it’s like something is slowing me down, maybe I’m looking for some quid pro quo to try and balance it out, make it more palatable.

But we believe we are made in God’s image, not just a product of cosmic accident, and every woman, man and child has value. And we here this morning are Lutheran flavored Christians and we believe that there are behaviors that flow and grow out of our beliefs, from our faith, one of those behaviors can change society, that is the act of forgiving.

We are fallen, separated from God and our instinctive reaction is to retaliate when we are attacked, hurt, or wronged. Now I’m not talking about justice, nor do I think crime should go unpunished. But if we get into the retaliation business, lashing out at those who did us wrong, well, that might be a full-time job. That kind of thing is a problem in many other cultures, but it’s not something we customarily practice in this country. Really the way a family flourishes, a community flourishes, a society flourishes is to forgive, cycles of retribution have to be broken.

Forgiveness should be one of things that marks us as Christians, it should be something that makes people remark on our Lord Jesus, it should stand out, not only are we forgiven ourselves, but we think so much of what has been done for us that we forgive others in turn. We as Lutheran Christians should not be known for our anger, jealousy, resentment and hatred of others, we are forgiven and when we are wronged, we are to forgive.

I’ve been with people who even when they are dying, near death, still can’t forgive some past injustice. The thing is, as I said last week, forgiveness isn’t easy but since when is following Christ easy? But nonetheless we are called to forgive because we are forgiven. Listen again to Jesus’ words “And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Our hearts need to be broken because a proud heart cannot forgive anymore than a defensive heart can forgive. The Holy Spirit must break our hearts so the love of Christ can be poured into them, and with that love, we are able to forgive others. It does not come from us, it comes from God.

When we forgive we leave the past behind us, we live as people of hope, looking to the future, we still see the past but we can all the more see what God has given us,

what he has done for us, and we look to the kingdom of God. Refuse to forgive and it hurts you more than anyone else, it limits your enjoyment of life.

We study God's word because we learn more about God that way, we love service to others as Jesus served us, we love because God first loved us, we forgive because we are forgiven. There's not "yin and yang", it not "balancing the force", it's not nirvana or anything else, it is simply the Christian way. Love and forgiveness are the only way to bring real, true hope to people.

Each of us is the person who owed ten thousand talents, and Jesus took our sins costing far more than ten thousand talents, on his shoulders and bore them to the cross, that God's mercy can be ours. We cannot comprehend God's holiness and are unaware of how often we offend him. But our Lord Jesus is telling us that we are the man who owed 10,000 talents. That's the case and we have been forgiven, and we are to find it in our hearts to forgive those who have wronged us, because we are people of hope.

AMEN