

**September 17, 2017**

**Tough Forgiveness**

**Read the Gospel lesson of the day -  
Matthew 18: 21-35**

You've all heard of tough love, right? Well today in our readings we hear about "tough forgiveness." Whereas tough love teaches us to let our children or loved ones learn for themselves the hard way, tough forgiveness is where the hard part gets put on us. In all of our readings we get a larger picture of what forgiveness means. On the one hand we know that forgiveness comes easy sometimes. But, on the other hand we all know that forgiveness can be tough to both give and receive.

Consider the Old Testament lesson. There we find Joseph's brothers afraid that they won't receive forgiveness. Because of this they come up with a plan to win, and in a way, earn that forgiveness. They use their father's death as a tragic event to spur family love and forgiveness in their brother Joseph, and then in an effort to secure forgiveness from the brother that they sold into slavery, these men fall down at his feet begging for forgiveness.

Joseph was then in a tough position. On the one hand he was thrown in a well and sold into slavery. Eventually God used that for good in his life, and he realized this, but that didn't mitigate the years of hardship between the well and becoming a ruler. So, notice well his answer to their pleas and plots, "Fear not. Am I in the place of God. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Joseph didn't not excuse their action. There is no excuse for selling your brother into slavery even now. Instead, Joseph simply forgives them. The deed is done. There is no more fear for the forgiven.

Now consider the Gospel lesson. In an effort to sound generous, Peter as the spokesmen for the disciples (because he appears to be the only one brave

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enough to ask difficult questions and stick his foot in his mouth), asks Jesus if forgiving someone seven times was enough. Jesus of course blows that number out of the water with an answer that amounts to forgiving as often as someone asks for it.

With his parable and his 77 times for forgiving, Jesus demonstrates that for whom much is forgiven, they too must forgive much. We have been forgiven our sins, just as the disciples were. But, consider the responsibility that puts on us. Because we were forgiven in Jesus' death and resurrection, the place of judgment was taken from our grasp (not that it was ever ours, but we like to think that way). Because of our own salvation and forgiveness, we are tasked with forgiving others!

Finally, consider the Epistle lesson. This lesson really ties the other lessons together. Here Paul admonishes us not to judge. He takes the lesson of forgiveness that Jesus drives home and shoes us how it extends into all of our life, even to the daily practices of our fellow believers. "If one doesn't eat certain things, you can't hold that against them," Paul reminds us. Just as we don't get to hold sins against others, neither do we get to hold practices against our neighbor. Instead, if those actions are sinful we correct them and forgive them, but otherwise we do what we can to not offend them in their understanding or drive them from the grace of God with our freedom.

As you can see, tough forgiveness is tough. It isn't easy to forgive all the time. But, that is the task we receive for being forgiven ourselves. We, like Joseph, call the sin a sin and do not excuse it, but we still forgive it. After that the deed is done, there is nothing for either side to fear. Together with one another and with the world, let's practice tough forgiveness.

*Pastor Carl J. H.*

