

March 20, 2022

Third Sunday of Lent

John 18:12-27

Peter's Denial

This story brings us to the question, who do you need to forgive? This Sunday is actually about forgiveness. It is a strange topic for Christians. How we forgive others transgressions against us effects how God will forgive us in the next life. Luke 6:37, "Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." Mark's gospel is much more to the point on the issue. Mark 11:26, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your trespasses." How we forgive in this life has a direct impact on how God forgives us our trespasses.

That being said, this morning's gospel is very interesting. Jesus gets to experience a human situation that we all dread. Having a trusted friend abandon and deny us. Some might argue that it is a betrayal just behind Judas's. This situation is a big betrayal of Jesus by Peter. This is an odd departure from Peter's character. Remember that Peter was the one who said he would die with Jesus if he had too. That Jesus was the Messiah. Peter was the one who cut off a person's ear in order to defend Jesus. All so that He would not be arrested. The three denials now are truly out of character. Did things get too real? Were the

questions too challenging for Peter? I will have to ask Peter when I see him at the Pearly Gates.

Back to our question. Jesus has to forgive Peter for his denial. Which I am sure Jesus did as soon as Peter denied Him. Unfortunately Peter does not know that yet. It will come later after the resurrection. Peter is the one who needs to ask Jesus for forgiveness. Most importantly Peter needs to figure out how to forgive himself. He needs to process what he had just done and all the emotions that come with it. Only time will help Peter with his situation. In a parallel situation there is Judas Iscariot and his betrayal of Jesus. Judas gets so depressed for betraying Jesus that he could not think of forgiving himself. Two similar situations but with very different outcomes. Judas would hang himself for what he did and later Peter would be welcomed back into the group of disciples. There is proper timing for the giving and asking for forgiveness.

So back to our original question. Who do you need to forgive? Most of the time it is ourselves. This is the hardest person to forgive. It requires us to look deeply at who we are at the core of our being. That can be very scary for many people. We all have a dark side to our personalities. Thank you Carl Jung. That is why it is so difficult to forgive ourselves. This process can require a lot of personal work. That is why it is so much easier to forgive others. I would say that the Lord's Prayer could use an update or an appendix about forgiving ourselves. "Give us the daily courage and strength to look deeply within ourselves. The energy to work on who we are so that we can forgive ourselves."

Don't get me wrong. Forgiving others can be complex in its own ways. There are times we let people live in our heads rent free for years. We

think about how they have wronged us and we cannot forgive it or let it go. So these people take up a lot of our mental energy and thoughts. Most of the time those people are not even aware that they have wronged us in some way. The responsibility is then on us to move forward and forgive them. This is mostly for our own mental health.

Forgiveness is a very complex thing. Forgive when and where you can. You can do it verbally or mentally. Whatever works for you and depending upon the situation. Forgiveness is good for your mental health and spiritual well-being. Be humble enough to ask for it when you need too. Forgive freely and as often as you can. That includes others and yourself. Being a student of irony, I'll share Mathew 18:21-22 with you. It came full circle and bit Peter on the back side. "Then Peter came to Him and said," Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him. Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." That is a beautiful way of saying forgiveness is perfect. Then be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. Forgive as He does with us.

Lenten Reflection: Acts 2:43. "Then fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles."

God's power is at work in the early church. Just a few clarifications before we proceed. The word translated as fear is actually AWE in Greek. Poor translations can create different images in the minds of the reader. So it should read, "Then awe came upon every soul." The other thing to take note of is that it is the Holy Spirit working through the apostles. It is nothing that they are doing solely on their own. All

so that these awesome wonders and signs can be manifested and take place. It is the Holy Spirit working through them.

In the early church the Holy Spirit moved and performed many awesome signs and wonders through the apostles. This was to encourage and strengthen the faith of those who came to believe in Jesus as Lord. This was how the church spread and grew in its early days. The Holy Spirit guided and moved in the church. Just as it still does today. The only thing that changed is the people the Spirit uses.

In order for us to be instruments of the Holy Spirit, we first must say YES to God. The Holy Spirit will not use us or move through us without our consent. Remember the Virgin Mary and the visit from the Archangel Gabriel. Mary said Yes to God and well we know the rest of how that story played out. When we say YES to the Holy Spirit our lives will change in ways we could never have imagined.

One individual that said YES to the Holy Spirit was St. Francis of Assisi. He wrote a beautiful prayer about how the Holy Spirit worked through him. Actually it is a prayer giving his permission to the Holy Spirit to use him in the world. I find it a great prayer to help me refocus on my responsibility as a Christian. I'll share it with you.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek, to be consoled, as to console; To be understood, as to understand. To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.