

Good Friday St Paul's Halifax 2018 The First Word

Luke 23:34

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing.”

Luke 5: 17-26

¹⁷ One day, while Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal.

¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying a paralysed man on a bed.

They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus;

¹⁹ but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

²⁰ When he saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.’

²¹ Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, ‘Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

²² When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?’

²³ Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you”, or to say, “Stand up and walk”?

²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the one who was paralysed—‘I

say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.’

²⁵Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.

²⁶Amazement seized **all** of them, and **they** glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today.’

The Word of the Lord.

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When one is granted 5 to 10 minutes for a meditation, one should NEVER google the central word for that meditation on Oremus, a favourite site. I, of course, did just that. And in the New Revised Standard Bible translation, the word “forgive” is used 133 times. That doesn’t include forgiven, forgiveness or other like terms.

Just forgive. But... the situations in which this word is used are varied. To me, and I expect to you, forgive should be a straightforward thing. Often difficult, but straightforward. I do wrong to you, or I do wrong to God. I discover my wrongness, or sin. I ask you or God to forgive me. You or God either do, or don’t. But whichever way it goes, forgiven or unforgiven, I set about to make amends, endeavouring to avoid falling into that particular sin again.

But... google it in the Bible... in the Books of the Law alone -

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy - there's some pretty complicated sinning and forgiving and not forgiving going on .

The innocent are condemned with those who are guilty of violent inhospitality in Sodom. **Joseph's** brothers who sold him as a slave want forgiveness from him purely for their own self preservation. Three thousand of those who worshipped the golden calf in the wilderness are killed at the direction of Moses, who then asks God to forgive the rest but instead God sends a plague upon them.... then there are the formalizing of rituals for forgiveness in Leviticus - as if sin and forgiveness are becoming big business; Then there's Joshua warning the Hebrews that they could not enter the promised land unless forgiven as a nation. Sinner and saint judged as one.

I could go on; but it is simply the voice of God echoing through the ages - Here I am; come back, start again, please listen. Hear my words. See my actions. Feel my love. - in 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles,, Nehemiah, the Psalms, Proverbs, the prophets major and minor, the wisdom literature - a call to a people not unlike us who are distracted by everyday life, by dreams, fears, hope, anger... it is the Old Testament, the Old Covenant: in distant times from ours. In distant lands from ours. With different concepts and understandings from ours. And it is only near the

end of the collection that the concept of “forgive” starts to give guidelines for the individual. In the book of the prophet Micah:

“God has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to **love kindness**,  
and to walk humbly with your God?”

There begins the advantage given to us. The teaching begins, and reaches its pinnacle in the gift of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. And through him, forgiveness gains clarity. Becomes personal. Something we each can strive for, or indeed avoid the need for by living the new life in Christ. In the scripture reading with which I began, we are reminded that God’s forgiveness overrides human formulas and rituals. The forgiving love of God cannot be filtered by those in power, in this case, the Pharisees.

In Matthew 18, Simon Peter asks Jesus exactly how many times is he expected to forgive one who sins against him. Seven?

That’s a good number, he thinks. But he receives the answer 70 x 7 - and don’t think it really means 490 times, because scripture is never really concerned with numbers - for 70x7 read “every time”.

So God’s forgiving love cannot be filtered by human beings. We humans are commanded by that love to be forgivers. And in the

words of the Lord's Prayer, which we shall say at the end of our worship - we are told that unless we are forgivers, we may not be among the forgiven.

That last bit maybe not so easy. When we're hurt, it's hard... but think... be reminded of the actions and words so important to this day - God's Friday - Good Friday:

**Luke 23:34**

"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing."

There he hangs. Betrayed, abandoned by most who loved him. In agony imposed by ones following orders, who didn't know him, didn't care. In a situation maneuvered by some who feared what might happen should his movement not be stopped.

'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'

That is forgiveness. That is the love of God. That is GRACE - undeserved love. Filling. Overflowing. Free. And today, and everyday, **That** is the heart of the matter.