

Proper 22C: Luke 17:1-10

Forgiveness is hard work

1. Our focus changes this week from the faithful use of money to the work of forgiveness
 - a. As all of you know, we live in a sinful world, no news flash there.
 - i. That's why our Lord starts our Gospel reading with, **"Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!"** (Lk 17:1)
 - ii. The Greek word used here for temptation is a word we have in English – **scandals**, something that would be a stumbling block to faith
 - iii. In a sinful world, things are going to be present to tempt believers ("these little ones") away from the faith
 - iv. But woe to the one who creates these stumbling blocks, it would be better for them to be cast into the sea than face God's judgment!
 - b. But what about when those scandals, those stumbling blocks are things that occur in the church?
 - i. Listen to what our Lord says as He goes on, **"Pay attention to yourselves (i.e. believers)! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,"** (Lk 17:3)
 - ii. Again, we live in a sinful world and the church is made up of sinners!
 - iii. Whether by accident or intentionally Christians will fall and their behavior will give offense even to each other.
 - iv. I am sure there are more than a few of you who have been hurt or wronged by someone in your church family right here, maybe you're still nursing a grudge because of it.
 - c. Forgiveness should be a bread-and-butter issue in our lives as Christians, over and over we are commanded to forgive as we have been forgiven.
 - i. And you'd think that if it was such an integral part of the faith, it'd be a little easier to do.
 - ii. But forgiveness is HARD WORK!
 - iii. Anyone who's lived in a family, been married, or had close friends knows that those closest to you can offend - often most painfully
 - iv. Sometimes these offenses can be "scandalous" to the faith and undermine their witness to Christ's love
 - d. And when our Lord explains what it really looks like to forgive, He doesn't lighten the load He sets the bar even higher
 - i. **"and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."** (Lk 17:4)
 - ii. That's a pretty tall order! Who would be fool enough (according to worldly wisdom) to let themselves be treated in such a way?
 - iii. You all know the axiom, "Fool me once shame on you. Fool me twice shame on me," that certainly applies even more when someone actually sins against us, how difficult it is to forgive!

- iv. Thus, the Apostles exclaim, “Increase our faith!” – Indeed, because they recognized they weren’t capable of living up to such a standard, either.
- 2. There was a story I caught on TV several years ago that made an impression on me.
 - a. The show was called, “Too Young to Kill” – about murderers under 18 years old
 - i. One story unfolded of 16-year-old boy, son of a pastor who became increasingly enraged over parents’ curtailment of violent video games
 - ii. One thing led to another and eventually son shot them both as they sat in the living room – killing the mother injuring the pastor father
 - iii. The father said when he became conscious, he was enraged, that rage became hatred for his son and what he’d done
 - b. But he remembered the Gospel – that he was a minister who preached God’s forgiveness and now he wrestled with hatred of own son.
 - i. Eventually he prayed that God would help him with his unforgiveness in light of what God had done for Him which is where our ability to forgive originates.
 - ii. He forgave his son...spoke on his behalf in court, and though the son was sentenced to life in jail the father can say he loves him and forgives him
 - iii. Forgiveness is hard work – even for ministers of the cross, **“Lord increase our faith!”**
 - c. That kind of forgiveness is beyond any sinful human being, it’s not in our nature to forgive
 - i. At best what we usually offer is conditional, “I’ll forgive but I won’t forget” - that’s not forgiveness.
 - ii. Yet, we still pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our trespasses **as we forgive those who trespass against us.**”
 - iii. How often do we really consider what we’re saying...what you are committing yourself to before God...do you truly forgive those who trespass against you?
 - iv. Contrast with our Lord, **“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”** (Ps. 103:12)
- 3. Thankfully, Someone has already done the hard work of forgiveness for you!
 - a. Forgiveness takes a death, in our case the death of our sinful desire to get justice for being wronged, but how?
 - i. Biblically, forgiveness is a life for a life transaction. Heb 9 says, **“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”**
 - ii. In the OT that was an innocent lamb who was sacrificed not only for forgiveness from God but also to restore fellowship between people.
 - iii. Our Lord, the Lamb of God, took upon Himself all of our sins against God and all of the sins committed against us

- iv. Isaiah 53:5 says, **“But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.”**
- b. And because He has so graciously forgiven us for all that we do against God’s Law He has freed us to forgive others when they sin against us, that we can die to ourselves and live for Him!
 - i. Nor has He left us alone to figure out how to carry this out, He provides for the increase of our faith that enables us to forgive one another!
 - ii. First, in Holy Baptism not only are we brought into His family and given a new identity but He begins the work of renewal as we’re told by Paul, **“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”** (Rom 6:4)
 - iii. A large part of that newness is the ability and desire to forgive as we have been forgiven
 - iv. And also in the Sacrament we not only receive forgiveness and commune bodily with our Lord but we’re strengthened to go out into the world with the same.
- c. Dearly beloved rejoice that your loving God has done the hard work of forgiveness for you and He continually provides you the grace and strength necessary to forgive others!