

The Power of Forgiveness

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I'm glad you came here an hour early. It feels like 9:00 but it's actually 10:00. I would like to first just say I'm really grateful to be here and I want to give thanks to our senior pastor for giving me this opportunity to be here. By the way, I consider her to be the Babe Ruth of the Sunday Sermon, if you know what I mean.

Also I want to give a shout-out to my family and to my brothers and sisters in District 8. District 8 is a big area. It's about seven states: Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri – if you're from here you can shout, too – North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. I'd like to also say happy birthday to Yaz, who's out there in Omaha.

It's a big district. It's about 1,000 miles from north to south and it's about 600 miles from east to west. You could fit in England, France, and Spain and still have some room left over. That's how big it is.

Uncle Frank's Second Chance

I wanted to share with you to start with about my family. About three years ago, one of my brothers-in-law was diagnosed with renal cancer, and the doctors were very concerned. They thought it might even be terminal, but they weren't sure. So the calls went out for everybody to start praying for Uncle Frank.

Two of the nephews, who were brothers – at the time, one was seven and one was about five – were sitting at the breakfast table, and their mother asked them, "O kay, before we start breakfast, can you say a prayer for Uncle Frank?" So Jacob, the seven-year-old, said, "Y eah, I want to pray." He said, "Heavenly Father, dear Heavenly Father, please give Uncle Frank one more chance." Then the five-year-old, Luke, said, "W ell, can I pray, too?" "Sure, honey, you can pray." "Dear Heavenly Father, please give Uncle Frank two more chances."

I think Uncle Frank was actually very glad that Luke prayed that prayer because Uncle Frank came through the surgery very well. They took out a kidney, and they also took out 20 lymph nodes, I guess to detect if there was any cancer around the body. So he started feeling better and about 11 months later he was out on a motorcycle with some of his buddies. They were at an intersection when a car ran the red light and broadsided him on his motorcycle. So he ended up in the hospital, but actually with just a broken collar bone. The injury is not so bad, but he used up both his chances in less than a year.

Forgiveness

This morning I want to talk to a little bit about forgiveness. When we think about forgiveness, we realize that it's really about cleansing, and a second chance as well. The amazing thing about Father is that he understood this, even at a very early age. We see in his poem "The Crown of Glory" that Father clearly understood at that time the value of forgiveness.

I'll read the center part of that poem.

Even though we are deceived, still believe.

Though we are betrayed, still forgive.

Love completely, even those who hate you.

Wipe your tears away and welcome with a smile

those who know nothing but deceit;

And those who betray without regret.

Father was sent to prison by America in 1984, and yet still he gave America so much. He gave America another chance, and I guess for that matter he gave the world another chance. To this day, Father continues to love America. Even after America officially rejected him and put him in prison, Father has truly forgiven this nation.

"You Must Be Like Cranes"

Now I'm sure you have noticed that Father has a fascination with cranes. Often he speaks about cranes: how magnificent they are and how we should be able also to fly like them. I have part of a talk that he gave. The flight of a crane may resemble our life of faith.

Can a crane fly well? No, it can't fly very well – to start with. Once it starts to fly, however, no bird can follow it. This is what's so great about the crane. When the crane starts to fly with its big strides, it doesn't look like it's going to be able to fly. However, no one can follow the crane once it has started flying. It has that kind of authority. So you must be like cranes. What is the bird that can fly the longest distance without moving its wings? It's the crane; it is not the eagle.

Are you going to become like a baby goose or a baby crane? Geese are quite nice birds. When they walk around with their feathers spread out on their backs, they look quite nice. They would make good disco dancers. Would you like to become a champion disco dancer, or would you like to become like a crane? If you want to become like a crane, you have to learn how to align yourself to the vertical line of the universe. In other words, you have to have the right kind of attitude.

People have to have an upright conscience. For this to be achieved, the vertical line already needs to be drawn in your life, and you have to know this. The crane flies really high, but we at this time can't fly so high. Even if you can't really fly that high, you should at least try to fly at the middle level. In order to follow Father and Mother, you have to look high. You should not have your eyes fixed on the ground. Even if you start flying in the middle level, the more you fly, the higher you will go. Your whole body needs to go up.

I haven't even reached the conclusion, but you look as though you are wondering whether I'm going to ask you to make some more sacrifices.

(Sounds like him, doesn't it?) You're right. I am, because that is your destiny. So for us to fly spiritually, like the crane, we need to let go of the excess baggage that we have. We need to learn about forgiveness.

I did some research and I found some great things about forgiveness. Paul Boese writes, "Forgiveness does not change the past, but it enlarges the future."

St. Patrick the Englishman

In a couple of days, on Saturday, it's going to be St. Patrick's Day. Are there any Irish out there? Would you be surprised to know that St. Patrick was actually English? That's true. He was born about 1,600 years ago. When he was about 16 he was captured by some Irish raiders and taken to Ireland, where he was held captive as a slave for about six years. Patrick worked as a herdsman. Writing in his autobiography about those days, Patrick said, "I don't remember a day going by when I wasn't cold, or I wasn't hungry." But while he was in captivity, he prayed every day, and his faith grew stronger.

After six years, he heard a voice telling him that soon the day would come when he would go home and that his ship was ready to sail. So, fleeing his master, he traveled to a port about 200 miles away. He walked for days. And there he found a ship, and after various adventures he returned home safely to his family. But now he was no longer a teenager. He was in his mid to early 20s.

Patrick recounted that a few years after returning home he had a vision that changed his life. He wrote,

I saw a man coming, as it were, from Ireland. His name was Victoricus and he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them for me to read. I read the heading, "The voice of the Irish."

As I began the letter, I imagined at that moment that I also heard the voice of these very people who were from the western area of Ireland, and they all cried out to me as in one voice. "We appeal to you, holy servant boy, come, come and walk among us."

So what did Patrick do? He went back to the nation that had caused him all that suffering, and he became a blessing to a nation that had cursed him. St. Patrick actually lived out the rest of his days in Ireland. It's said that he lived to be the ripe old age of 100. He converted thousands and even tens of thousands, and maybe even 100,000 to Christianity, all because he was able to forgive.

Freeing Oneself through Forgiveness

Another quote I have is from Catherine Ponder, and I think about this one deeply. "When you hold resentment toward another person, you are bound to that person by a strong emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and to get free."

When I read that, I thought about the book from Dr. Sang Hun Lee, *Life in the Spirit World*. I happen to have a copy here because I just wanted to read a bit of it. This was at the time when he wanted to find all the war criminals and interview them. Just now in the text, he's looking for Hitler. Dr. Lee writes,

Hitler killed the Jews with great cruelty. Of all the murderers of history, Hitler inflicted the greatest slaughter. I thought that he would be living among an evil group of people. I was very busy finding people who I wanted to meet.

In the course of my efforts I happened to hear a group of Jews shouting, 'Let's kill him.' When I turned my head and looked, I witnessed a tremendous mass of people, all of whom were bound in chains and they were shouting, 'Kill him. Kill him.' The crowd was so vast that I could not see the end of the crowd.

Further, I could not readily find out who it was the crowd wanted to kill. The shouting of the crowd continued. There were many people covered with blood. Some of them fell down and then they were dragged by others. It was a tragic scene, reminiscent of a battlefield. Still, I could not discover the object of their murderous wrath. Searching here and there I tried to find that unfortunate person. In my heart I felt as if I was digging up mines in a minefield. Oh, my, what's wrong here?

Then came into my view someone hanging on a tree.

Of course that person was Hitler. Dr. Lee said, "I couldn't even get close to him because there were so many thousands of people surrounding him." Dr. Lee also said, "I wanted to talk to some of those people and say to them, 'Do you see where you are? You're in rock-bottom hell. There's no place lower than this, and you don't really belong here. You're not that

evil person. You don't really belong here.'" But the reason they were there in rock-bottom hell is because they were chained, chained by their resentment and they couldn't break free."

So he was praying to God, "What can I do to help?" God would say, "Well, there's nothing they can do until they come to the point where they can change themselves." That's the power of resentment.

Another author I like is Lewis Smedes, who has written a book on forgiveness. It's called *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts That We Don't Deserve*. He writes, "Gandhi was right. If we all live by an eye-for-an-eye, the whole world will be blind. The only way out is forgiveness." And, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

We attach our feelings to the moment when we were hurt, endowing it with immortality. Then we let it assault us every time it comes to mind. It travels with us, it sleeps with us ; it hovers over us ; it broods over us even while we die. Our hate does not even have the decency to die when those we hate die, because hate is a parasite that is sucking our blood, not theirs. There is only one remedy for that, and that is forgiveness. You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and you feel the power to wish them well .

Isn't that great? Amen. Let's give a clap.

Then one of my favorite quotes is this from Norman Cousins, "Life is an adventure in forgiveness. So you might as well get used to it." You might as well get used to it.

The Four Steps of Forgiveness

Dr. Ted Morter is a teacher who says that we can all learn the four steps of forgiveness. He says that forgiveness itself is a virtue which is necessary for our own health – our physical health and our spiritual health. The model of Dr. Morter is this: "Forgive the past and save your life." Forgive the past and save your life.

The process of forgiveness, he says, has four parts. First, you have to forgive the person who caused you pain. Second is that you have to give that person permission to forgive you for anything that you have done that may have caused problems. Third, you have to forgive yourself for all the pain and suffering you caused yourself by your reaction. And the fourth one is probably the most difficult. That is this: Learn a positive lesson. Learn something positive from your own experience. What happens there is that you take that negative memory and replace it with something positive.

Then he concludes with this. "Remember, you're forgiving that person for your own sake, not for that person's sake. So remember that forgiveness improves your life and also it improves your health." Isn't that great?

Psalms 22: The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

We've got St. Patrick's Day coming up. We also have Easter coming up. And another master of forgiveness is who? Jesus. Here he is; he's on the cross. He's ready to die. He has almost no breath left in him, and he says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

When people go to funerals, what's the book in Psalms that they read most often? Psalm 23, right? It starts, "The Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want." Do you know about the one that comes before that? The one before that , Psalms 22, starts like this: "Oh, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Sound familiar?

At that point in his life, Jesus is ready to die. He has no breath left in him. But I think he's allowing us to have a glimpse into his mind and his heart in the final moments of his physical life here on this earth. Would you bear with me if I read to you Psalms 22?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me ,

From the words of my groaning ?

*Oh, my God, I cry by day and you do not answer ;
And by night I find no rest.*

*Yet you are enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our ancestors trusted.
They trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried, and they were saved.
In you they trusted, and they were not put to shame.*

*But I am a worm and not human ;
scorned by others, despised by the people .
All who see me mock me.
They make their mouths at me.
They shake their heads;
“Commit your cause to the Lord – I
et him deliver him ;
let him rescue the one in whom he delights.”*

*Yet it was you who took me from the womb ;
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
On you I was cast from my birth.
Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.
Do not be far from me, for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*

*Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me.
They open their mouths like ravening and roaring lions.
I am poured out like water.
All my bones are out of joint ;
my heart is like wax.
It has melted within me.*

*My mouth is dried up like a potsherd.
My tongue sticks to my jaws.
You lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs are all around me,
and a company of evildoers surround me.
My hands and feet have shriveled.
I can count all my bones.
They stare and they gloat at me.
They divide my garments
And for my clothing they cast lots.*

*But you, oh Lord, do not be far away.
Oh, my help, come quickly to my aid.
Deliver me from the soul of the sword,
my life from the power of the dog.
Save me from the mouth of the lion.*

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

*I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters.
In the midst of the congregation I will praise you.
You who fear the Lord, praise him.
All of you offspring of Jacob, glorify him ;
stand in awe of him, all of you of Israel,
For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted ;
he did not hide his face from me but heard when I called.*

So this Jesus, at the cost of his life, gave us a second chance. He gave us a second chance. And he continued to love humanity even after he was mocked, tortured, and crucified. So when we think about holding onto our resentment and holding back our forgiveness, we really have no reason, do we, to hold back?

Advice from Longfellow

I'd like to close here with a Psalm. It's prose written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of my favorites.

...
*Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou are, to dust thou returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.*

...
*In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!*

*Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, - act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!*

*The lives of great men and women all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing yours, shall take heart once again.*

Isn't that great? So remember, if you want to fly with the cranes, you've got to practice forgiveness. Remember to practice forgiveness every single day. Forgiveness is a virtue, and it's a virtue that's actually good for your health, mentally and spiritually. Forgive somebody and change the world, or at least change your world.

So have a great week, everyone. Thank you, and God bless you.