

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Why is it so hard to forgive?

Intellectually, we can make a good case for forgiveness, and we know from experience that we feel better when we're able to do it. And yet, more often than not, we don't. We hold on to anger, we hold on to resentment — and it eats away at us. A lot of us, maybe even most of us, are like this. It's never been easy to forgive.

Why is it so hard to forgive people? I mean to truly forgive them? Everyone has somebody who has wronged them, or at least in their minds they have been wronged. We can all say, "I forgive but I will never forget.". But is this truly forgiving? Perhaps the person is no longer alive so you feel that forgiveness is no longer necessary. But guess what? Forgiveness isn't as much for the person who did the wrong as it is for the person who was wronged.

Every Sunday we ask for forgiveness from God for the sins we have committed. We say it in the opening: “Gracious God, have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin. We are truly sorry and humbly repent.” Then we say it again when we confess the Apostles Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the community of saints, and the forgiveness of sins.” And, once again when we say the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Yet, forgiveness is so much more than us just being forgiven by God for our sins. It is also about the reciprocal nature described in the Lord’s prayer.

I know of several different people who have had a falling out with a member of their family and subsequently

written the person out of their will. In a few cases, there was reconciliation before death, and in at least one case, the will was never changed. In others, the person remained written out. I also know of people who had a falling out and wrote a family member out of the will and never did have reconciliation. The person died without ever having forgiven the person with whom they disagreed or they died not being forgiven for their part. In all cases, things were unpleasant, messy and unnecessary.

A journalist named Elizabeth Bruenig shared the following in an article I read: “I say that I have four people that I’ve forgiven for things they’ve done to me. And it’s a decision that’s kind of like the 12 Steps program: You remake it every day, and you do it every day. Because sometimes it’ll come to you, the thing that happened. You’re standing at the sink or looking out the window at the bird feeder, and the fury comes back to you

and you want to explode all over again. At that point, you have to remake the decision to forgive.”

So which is worse? To not be forgiven for something you did or to not forgive someone else for something they did?

That’s a hard one. Sometimes, a person may be completely unaware how badly they have hurt you, so they are not affected by how you feel. In this case, the forgiveness is for you. If you forgive and let go of the anger, your heart will feel so much lighter and better.

Forgiveness is when you decide to permanently forgo seeking restitution or vengeance — or however you want to think about it. People like accountability. They like consequences, but forgiveness is something very different and strange, and requires enormous will and courage. I think it’s hard for us to get our arms around it because it

cuts against our instinctive understanding of justice as retribution.

Forgiveness is not deserved by definition. It's not something somebody earns. It's something that's freely given. You give it to someone for lots of reasons, for reasons of personal virtue, and for reasons of mercy and concern for the offender.

Non-Forgiveness, on the other hand, is a self-imposed prison. One of the most destructive and debilitating emotions we can harbor is chronic anger.

The Bible consistently portrays God as a forgiving and merciful God. Numerous passages emphasize His willingness to forgive those who repent and turn to Him. For example, Psalm 103:12 declares, "As far as the east is

from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

Christians are called to forgive others just as God has forgiven them. Jesus grants His disciples the authority to forgive people of their sins in today's gospel. He also teaches about the importance of forgiveness through parables, such as the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35. In this story, a servant who has been forgiven a large debt refuses to forgive a fellow servant's smaller debt. Through this parable, Jesus highlights the need for believers to extend forgiveness to others as they have received it from God.

Forgiveness is portrayed as a powerful force that can bring healing and reconciliation. Colossians 3:13 instructs believers to "bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as

the Lord forgave you." Choosing to forgive can release individuals from bitterness, resentment, and anger, leading to personal healing and restoration of relationships.

Ephesians 4:32 encourages believers to "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

The ultimate example of forgiveness is seen in the Lenten and Easter journey of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus provided the means for humanity's forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Acts 10:43 declares, "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Accepting God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ is central to the Christian message. As believers receive God's forgiveness, they are called to extend that forgiveness to others.

Forgiveness is a foundational concept in the Bible, highlighting God's mercy, human responsibility, the power of reconciliation, and the ultimate redemption found in Jesus Christ. It is both a gift to be received and a command to be obeyed, shaping the lives of believers and their relationships with God and others.

In today's gospel, Jesus grants His disciples the authority to forgive sins, highlighting the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness in the Christian community. This underscores the significance of the Gospel message in offering forgiveness and redemption to all who believe. And in doing this - in forgiving others and in seeking forgiveness - we are given the peace that Jesus brings in today's gospel: Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." So go forth and forgive those who have wronged you. Let it go. Send them a letter. Call them. Text them. If they don't accept

your forgiveness, then that is on them; you will have done your part. The Peace that Jesus brings will be so much brighter. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

We need to learn to forgive ourselves as well as others who may have wronged us. Give us the courage we need in order to do so. Then, give us the words we need. Open our hearts to those we love that we may be estranged from, no matter who is at fault. We know that love is the greatest commandment and peace and grace are the greatest gifts. Help us to find both in our lives before it is too late. In Jesus' name, Amen.