

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 19, 2015 (3rd Sunday of Easter)

Not long into the early church, especially associated with the apostle Paul, the church finds the main theme of Jesus' suffering and death to be the forgiveness of sins. Jesus on the cross forgives his tormentors. Such gross injustice must be forgiven or Jesus' friends would have been consumed by dysfunctional bitterness. In the sermons in the book of acts, there is always a welcome granted to all who hear. Doesn't matter what part the listeners played in Jesus' crucifixion, it's all new now. There is grace from God. There is mercy. Free forgiveness for all from God.

And as soon as we are forgiven, we feel the challenge to forgive in return. We feel the tension as we struggle. Why is it so hard to forgive? It's always easier to say "I forgive you," than it is to recover from the pain that another has caused us. Sometimes we feel we should just forgive and forget--just let it go. But for major injuries, insults, and failures the pain always comes back no matter how hard we try to forgive. We don't want it to come back. It just does. We even feel guilty because deep down there is pain as grief returns--each time slightly diminished in intensity. But as long as a loss is felt, there will be grief and often the need to forgive and extend a form of love to an offender.

Perhaps that is why Jesus reminds us that forgiveness is not something we do once or when we're feeling generous. It's something we do for the rest of our lives. And if we failed yesterday, there is always today to try again. Never once and done. Forgiveness is a lifestyle.

Forgiveness mainly involves our actions. Will I act based on love and mercy, or based on a debt which I hold over another. Will I make them pay, or will I set them and myself free.

Refusing to forgive is like punishing myself and expecting the offender to feel the pain. Pain can be intense. The only way to experience freedom is to share our pain with those we trust. Pain is healed by love. As we love and are loved by others, we are healed. Healing flows from love. I have been healed as I have seen and felt the love of my sisters and brothers. This healing has allowed me to forgive and given me freedom.

Of course it is so natural to feel hurt and anger in our pain. Healing frees us from anger and bitterness. The more we share our pain in safe ways, the more we forgive others, the less our anger will dwell in our souls as bitterness.

We must forgive. We must let go. We consecrate ourselves every day to live with mercy and compassion. The Peace of our risen Lord will find us. Mercy will find us. We will be healed in the most vital way—in our spirit and soul. God grant us mercy to practice mercy. God forgive us. . .to forgive. Amen.