

### Forgiveness 3 (Forgive yourself)

Given by Kathy Roberts at St Mary's, Black Torrington 24<sup>th</sup> August 2008 as part 3 of a three part series

#### Introduction

Alan Paton, a South African writer, wrote a story set in the dark years of Apartheid.

A white police lieutenant secretly carried on an affair with a black African woman. In South Africa that was against the law and it was regarded as an abominable .... unforgivable sin.

The lieutenant was confronted with the charge by his captain. He denied it, but the evidence was so overwhelming that he finally confessed. The captain then went to visit the lieutenant's father and shared with him his son's transgression.

The father asked the captain, *Is it true?*

The captain replied, *I fear it is true.*

The father insisted, *Are you sure?*

The captain said, *He confessed to me. It's true.*

Then there was silence except for the sound of the father's deep breathing. It was like the breathing of some creature in agonizing pain.

The lieutenant's mother and his aunt, the father's sister, were in the room observing the scene. The father turned to his sister and said, *Bring me the Book.*

She went to the bookcase, pulled down the heavy family Bible, took it to the father, and set it before him on the table. She wondered what passage he was going to read.

But he didn't read any passage at all. Instead he opened the front of the Bible where family names had been recorded for 150 years. He took pen and ink and crossed out the name of his son, Pieter van Vlaanderen, not once but many times as though to completely obliterate it from the page. He did that without any anger or despair (at least that anybody could see), without any words.

Then he turned to the captain and very calmly asked, *Is there anything more?*

The captain knew that this was his cue to leave, and he as he did, he offered the mother any kind of help he might be able to give.

But the father turned abruptly to him and said, *No one in this house will ask for help.*

So the captain left.

Then the father, still sitting at the table, turned to his sister and said, *Lock the door, and bolt it, and bring me the key. The door of our house will never open again.*

The door was closed forever. The son could never return home. (King Duncan, adapted)

## Accepting forgiveness

To all intents and purposes the woman of the gospel story had experienced the door of society firmly slammed shut against her. Because of what she had done and quite possibly because of what she was, she was an outcast.

When someone who has hurt you or been rude to you, or with whom you profoundly disagree – and frankly find disagreeable – walks into the room, what do you do? Do you shrink into a corner, ..... confront them,..... ignore them, ..... pretend they are not there?

The woman arrived at Simon's party for Jesus and as long as she stood in the background, the guests could ignore her. It was common practice *in the ancient world to allow access to a meal in honour of a major teaching figure* (Bock 1994:141).

It was only when she stepped out of the shadows that the problem arose. People became upset, shocked, not specifically with her, they had already indicated their disapproval to her.... but with Jesus. For he allowed her to not only approach him, but .... to anoint his feet ....with the most expensive perfume, ....and .... to undo her hair - which was culturally taboo in public for a woman - and then ..... to kiss his feet – expressing *an intimacy shunned in this culture* (Bock 1994:141).

But in spite of the horrified responses of the other guests, the woman continued. *The strength of her love has caused her to be bold in expressing appreciation to Jesus.* (Bock 1994:142). She knew, to the very core of her being, what it was to be forgiven and accepted by Jesus. And she had allowed forgiveness to permeate right through her. Her love and gratitude was poured out in an extravagant and beautiful act. She had, in effect, forgiven herself which, in turn, made it possible to be free to act ..... in spite of the hostile, unwelcoming glares she received from Simon and his guests.

Forgive yourself – accept the Lord's forgiveness of you. Allow it to permeate - and keep on allowing it to permeate. By writing Jesus' little parable to Simon (vss 41-44) in the imperfect tense, Luke was indicating to his readers the ongoing nature of each action. Debt....forgiveness debt....forgiveness. Total forgiveness.

We keep on doing and saying foolish and silly things, things we wished hadn't happened. And we launch into our endless litany of If Only..... if only .....

## Restored

The apostle Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road ....after he had been part of the stoning of Stephen. He wished he had never done it, had never persecuted the early followers of Jesus. And he carried the emotional scars of his behaviour. The woman washing the feet of Jesus would have carried the scars of her early life with her forever.

Although the scars remained, both the woman and Paul, became new people, accepting of their respective pasts and accepting of the deep and all-encompassing love that reached through to their very fibres of their beings and held them.

There is a passion in both the woman and in Paul that people sometimes find hard to connect with, but there is also humility and vulnerability that comes from the restoring work of forgiveness.

## Forgiven

The journey into forgiveness starts with God and ends with God. God offers forgiveness in Christ. Paul, the one who had consented to murder and the unjust imprisonment of others, could confidently write in his magnum opus, the letter to the Romans, *There is therefore now*

*no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!* (8:1) He had accepted God's forgiveness and .... let go of his past. .... Can you?

Accepting means letting go of the regrets, the if onlys...making restitution where necessary and if appropriate, and then offering it all to the Lord for his healing and blessing. Maybe we need to keep on doing it.

Remember the cycle: debt...forgiveness....acceptance.

Sometimes it can be helpful to do something symbolically to indicate letting go and allowing forgiveness to seep into ourselves.

In prayer clench a fist tightly and then open it out again.  
Or, hold a stone and symbolically put it down, perhaps in front of a cross.

Corrie Ten Boom, Dutch evangelist and writer used to say that when God has forgiven us our sins, he has cast them into the deepest sea and put up a sign saying *No Fishing!*

Should you find yourself fishing, throw the sharks of past regrets right back. If you allow them into your boat, they will only snap and bite and destroy. Let them go ...and let God deal with and heal the memories of the past.

### **Conclusion**

We started the series with God forgives you and travelled on to forgive others and we have come to forgive yourself.

The father of lieutenant Pieter van Vlaanderen in Alan Paton's story shut the door between his family and his son and the rest of the world. A tragedy about to unfold.

If we close ourselves off to the possibilities of forgiveness – receiving God's forgiveness, giving forgiveness to others, forgiving ourselves, it too becomes a tragedy about to unfold.

**God forgives you**  
**Forgive others**  
**Forgive yourself.**

What will you choose to do today..... tomorrow ....and all your days?

### **References**

Darrell L Bock, *Luke*, IVP 1994  
King Duncan, *Collected Sermons, Dynamic Preaching*, 2005