

Forgiveness 1 (God forgives you)

Given by Kathy Roberts at All Saint's, Bradford 10th August 2008 as part 1 of a three part series

Introduction

How do you feel after pushing a heavy wheelbarrow up a slope? Or staggering to the car after Christmas shopping, laden with parcels only to find the car is on the other side of the parking lot? Tired? Irritable? Sore muscles? Aching feet?

Deep inside we feel something like that

- when we're alienated from othersbecause there has been hurt.
- when we're not at peace with ourselves and
- when we are not at peace with God.

It is sin that separates us, weighs us down, depresses us.

Let's look for a moment at the paralysed man lying on his bed in front of Jesus. There was something weighing him down. Sin, actually, is not just something we **do**, *it is something we are*.

Richard Rohr, priest and author, says,

Sin is manifested in oppressive or destructive lifestyles that totally wrap some people up, the unreal way some people have of relating.

For instance,

A family can easily get caught in that lifestyle sin.... A young man once said, 'our family knows only one way to relate... we put one another down, we talk to one another negatively, our language is filled with sarcasm, resentment and violence. It's the only way I've ever seen our family relate.'

If you grew up in a family environment like that, it's a most base and malicious kind of entrapment, because that's the only way you'll know how to relate for the rest of your life. That's sin. That's the sin that controls us and keeps us from living in the truth. It keeps us from seeing the vision of the whole. Sin is not just something we do, an isolated action. Those isolated actions or omissions are much more the effects of sin rather than sin itself. (Rohr 1997: 106)

Sin is the distorted personalities people are trapped in. Sin is the illusionary lives that people live and the twisted motives that drive them. In a very real way, people are 'paralysed' by sin. (Rohr 1997: 106)

Sin is separation

Sin encompasses all sorts of meanings from deliberate disobedience to rebelliousness and wickedness, to unintentional acts of wrongdoing – a mistake.

Some things we do ourselves, some are done to us - and it cripples us. There is darkness inside each of us, that, mostly, we try to ignore. Carl Jung spoke about our 'shadow'.

As we look inside ourselves we can recognise

- a lack of inner freedom,
- pain,

- regrets about words and actions - which we replay over and over, often prefaced with the words *if only* ...

Our lives can also be twisted and misshaped by the sin of others. Those who have been belittled and abused frequently act out of that belittlement and abuse, because that is the only way they know. As Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, says, *hurt people hurt people*.

Sin not only paralyses us, but separates us from others and fundamentally, from God. It renders us incapable of loving – and being fully loved. How often haven't we said words like *I am no good, I am a failure as ... a parent, a spouse, a friend, a colleague.... Everything I do seems to crumble to ashes in my hands*.

Forgiveness is costly

God knows that as people we are crippled, paralysed, separated from love. And Jesus came to live amongst us,

- showing us God,
- reflecting God's love and acceptance of us,
- God's aching longing for us to be reconciled to him.

Jesus was rendered helpless and effectively paralysed, separated from God in order to offer us the gift of forgiveness, of wholeness, of new life.

It is a gift that cost him everything. Consider this: the only man-made things in heaven are the wounds on Jesus' hands and feet and in his side, emblems of our destructive cruelty.

Forgiveness is free

Forgiveness from God is free. All that we need to do is to offer him our darkness, our pain, our sense of hopelessness and to ask for his cleansing, his healing, his forgiveness - and then with open hearts, receive all that he offers.

The process of forgiveness means

- the restoration of relationship*
- the working through of pain, anger and alienation;*
- and the opening of the future to appropriate relating with trust and good faith which permits risk, spontaneity and the possibility of future failure or conflict*

(New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology 1995:389)

Receiving love, being in relationship, being reconciled. What does that sound like to you? It's possible, but

- sometimes it is too hard to do on our own.
- Sometimes we will need to pray with someone else.
- Sometimes formal confession to a priest is required, in order to receive the words of forgiveness and reconciliation from God.

In Jeremiah God says *I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.* (31:20) – not put it together again That's what re-member-ing means.

A person once prayed, *remember not my sins O Lord.*

What sins? said the Lord. *I forgot them long ago. You'll have to prod my memory.* (de Mello 1982:141) Love, you see, keeps no record of wrongs. (I Corinthians 13)

Living in forgiveness **will** change us. The Holy Spirit **will** bring about healing in us. People who know themselves forgiven **are different!**

Do you recall the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them clean with her hair? A Bit over- the-top we more conservative people might feel – but there was a woman released from sin, forgiven. A paralysed man picked up his bed and walked, forgiven.

There was a Zen school in Japan where young boys were training in the discipline of meditation. One of them kept stealing. Finally the group put together a petition and brought the thief to the master. They stood there and said, *We are threatening right now to leave because we can't stand this thief any longer.*

The Zen master approached them, looked at them, and said, *You are wise brothers. You are very wise. You are wise because you know the difference between right and wrong. You may go somewhere else to study if you wish, but this poor brother does not even know right from wrong. Who will teach him if I do not? I am going to keep him here even if all the rest of you leave.*

Apparently the boy who had been stealing burst into tears and it was as if the desire to steal was banished from him forever in that decisive moment.

(Deep Joy for a Shallow World, Richard A. Wing, CSS Publishing Company, 2001, adapted)

Charles Colson, a henchman of Richard Nixon, had his life turned around by being forgiven. He went to prison for the things he had done wrong – we don't necessarily escape the consequences of our wrongdoing. He subsequently worked with others in prison.

In the latest *Inspire* magazine there is the story of MC Tempo, a rap artist who turned away from drugs and was healed of total deafness in one ear.

He said,

If God hadn't come into my life when I called out, I'd either be dead or in jail by now. Inviting God into my life was the best thing I ever did. He spun me round and I haven't stopped yet. I tell everyone, if they don't know Jesus, just ask him to help you. Your life will never be the same again(Inspire:9)

Conclusion:

God is offering forgiveness, fully, freely to each of us. Will we accept his gift fully and freely into our lives?

A short silence now to reflect and then we will say the confession on page 209, using form 1

If we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing. (1 John 1:9)

References:

Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird* 1982

Inspire, July August 2008

New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology, IVP:1995

Richard Rohr, *The Good News According to Luke*, Crossroads 1997