

Letting Go: Seventy Seven Times
Matthew 18:21-35
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May the God who creates us...
Good Morning.

The apostles and Jesus are just recently down from the mountain top, where he was completely transfigured, transformed in a blaze of glory before Peter, James and John. They are down from the mountain top where it became very real to them that Jesus was more than just an amazing teacher, prophet or preacher, but in fact, He is, as they heard, a voice from on high proclaiming, "this is my son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased." It is clear to them that He is the one.

As they journey down from the mountain and continue their travels, Jesus tells them to tell no one what they have seen and heard. They honor his request, and they aren't saying much about him to anyone else, but they cannot un-hear, they cannot un-see what they now know, Jesus is much more than they ever, ever imagined.

So what follows is a series of teaching sessions, with parables and sayings and an intense period of the apostles asking questions and Jesus patiently answering, you get the feeling that they are trying to learn everything they can from him in those very intense days. Which eventually brings Peter to asking Jesus about that thorny issue of sin and forgiveness.

Peter says, "So Lord, if someone sins against me, how often must I forgive them? As many as seven times?"

To which Jesus says, "It's not about the numbers, it's not about the counting, it's about our stance toward people in our lives. It's about forgiving, letting go, beyond reasonability. Seventy-Seven times. No actually, seventy times seven times. It's about forgiving—beyond reasonable accountability.

When was the last time you were hurt, wronged, disparaged, shamed, insulted, or disregarded? Do you remember that?

Take a moment and think.

Now—having remembered that encounter—can you recall the last time something like that happened and you let it go? Can you remember the last time you forgave the person who perpetuated a wrong?

I don't know about you—but I know, it was much easier for me to recall a time I'd been wronged than a time when I let it go.

So how is that forgiveness thing going for you?

What might be getting in our way?

Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf puts it perfectly when he says: “Forgiveness flounders because we exclude the enemy from the community of humans and exclude ourselves from the community of sinners.”

Or to paraphrase Dr. Volf— no one is ever as good as we want them to be or as bad as we think they are.

So how’s that forgiveness thing going for you?

What my friends are we hanging onto? What injustice, what slight in our lives do we seem completely and utterly incapable of letting go? And—given our completely and utterly frail, fragile human ways, what sins, what slights, what wrongs might we contemplate seeking forgiveness for? What wrongs have we committed that we desperately need to address?

There is an old Hindi folk tale—It seems there is one particularly easy way to catch monkeys (that is of course presuming that you want to catch monkeys):

A coconut shell is anchored to the ground and under the shell is a large ripe banana—a very attractive proposition to most monkeys.

In the coconut shell is a hole that is wide enough for a monkey to reach his or her open hand through the opening. Then, once the monkey’s palm is through the slot, it can grab hold of the juicy banana.

The problem is that the slot is not wide enough for the monkey to get its hand back out through the slot while he’s holding onto the piece of fruit. Although the monkey desperately does not want to be caught by the approaching humans—once he or she has hold of that banana, he or she seems completely incapable of letting go of it and slipping its hand back through the hole and running away.

The banana, as it were, seems to have a hold on the monkey.

Wrongs, slights, sins, perpetuated upon us—can be the juicy fruit that we cannot let go of. They can be the part of our lives that leaves us completely and utterly locked in one place—seemingly helpless to move on—quite simply because we will not let go.

The start of forgiveness, the beginning step for reconciliation and transformation is when we finally, slowly, gracefully or gracelessly let go of the sins committed against ourselves.

Seventy times Seven. Sounds never-ending doesn't it?
But maybe its just the start of how we change our lives, change our world.

If you think about it, there has never been a better time in our lives and in our country,
for each of us to begin the Christ-filled, gospel-fueled practice of letting go, and
forgiving.

70 x 7. I'm going to try.

Might you join me?

Amen.