

Hello all,

This week, instead of giving you the entire text of the sermon, I will give you a resumé of what I said. This is because what I had intended to preach was no longer relevant by the end of the week. This is a lesson in of itself that is tied to having a forgiving nature.

- 1) It is always necessary for us to have a sense of where we need to be headed.
- 2) However, we should never be so tied to our plans that we are not able to make a course correction in our plans.

I had intended to preach a sermon that was essentially tied to how forgiveness is really tied to a forgiving economy. This in the sense of everyone needs to be able to participate in being able to feed themselves.

The parallel of this in modern terms where our spirituality is concerned lies in embracing cultural and gender diversity. Just as someone should not push aside their material needs of food, clothing and shelter, nor should a person push aside their core identity.

This where I chose to move in a different direction: Namely to talk about the rise of phobia in Canada of late – mostly directed these days towards the LBGTq2S+ community. I shared some of personal story, which I will not share here only because I want to create the opportunity for more conversation. The bottom line is that, spiritually speaking, our society is in dire need of becoming more forgiving of diversity so everyone can flourish. Part of this means standing for a truth that recognizes that diversity is as necessary as making sure that everyone knows that it is okay to be themselves.

I know that doesn't answer a lot of questions. And that is really where we left it – giving the people the experience of what it might feel like to like in a more forgiving society rather than trying to explain it.

Please enjoy the scriptural interpretation that follows.

Be blessed. Be a blessing.

Amen.

Reverend Eric offers the following interpretation of today's reading from Matthew, which is Jesus' teaching on the command to forgive. Rev Eric writes

“Two of the most challenging teachings that we have in our New Testament gospels are the teachings found in Matthew on divorce and forgiveness. In fact, I would say that in my 23 years of ministry, I have had more conversation around these two teachings than everything else in the bible combined.

What is ironic, at least to my mind, is that even in Jesus' day, his teaching on divorce was meant to be taken as metaphor. Because divorce itself was allowed in his day. And yet we have taken the teachings on divorce as literal which has caused much pain to many people caught in very difficult circumstances. In other words, we made the teaching more than it needed to be.

What is also ironic, is that in Jesus' day, his teaching on forgiveness was meant to be taken literally in a very particular way. And yet over time, we have taken it not quite like metaphor, but close to that in the sense that we see it as a highly spiritualized teaching that must be always applied across all situations. And again, this interpretation has kept people trapped in very difficult situations, often leaving themselves feeling ashamed, feeling guilty and second guessing their right to speak up and defend themselves. And so again, we have made the teaching more than it needed to be.

Today, as we listen to the teachings on forgiveness, please understand here this one point; The core message that we are being offered in a concrete way is literally tied towards making sure that the economy is just. And this is not metaphor. A just economy is founded on at least two things. The first is that people must be able to work in harmony with each other. And working in harmony means that all members of a community need to find a way to get past holding on to old hurts on the one hand and make amends for the hurt we may have caused on the other. This is not done in isolation from each other. This is done amid shared community. Each lets of go hurt. Each makes amends to those that they have hurt. The teaching tells us that if that happens, everyone can be fed, literally. That's the first point of how forgiveness works.

The second point is tied to the first.

The ability to forgive in such concrete terms does not happen in a vacuum. Someone needs to go first. And that responsibility is placed on the shoulders of those in positions of power, wealth, and influence. You will also note, as we listen to today's reading, that there is a very strong responsibility placed upon the most powerful of any society to make forgiveness possible. The teaching leads us to understand that the more power we have, the more forgiving we are called to be. As a society, the healthier we want to be, the more forgiving we need to be.

It may sound like this teaching has little to offer us then. That is not what I am saying. I will take some time during my sermon to tie up the loose ends of this preamble. For now, though, let us listen to the lesson.”

Matthew 18:21-35

After Jesus finished saying “Where two or three are gathered, there I am too”, Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times.

And then Jesus told a parable.

“For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. So, the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’