

Evotional

Sermon title: ““Forgive swiftly.”

Speaker: Neil Durling.

Bible passage: Luke 23:26-47.

Date: 7.9.14.

Message:

There is a lot of anger, confusion and unforgiveness in this passage:

- *Simon of Cyrene:* An outsider, a nobody, an “innocent” man from Tripoli who is forced to carry Jesus’ cross with/for him. Jesus is so weak, due to the punishing torture and “sport” of the Roman soldiers – he was whipped, blindfolded, beaten and spat upon.
- *The large crowd (including wailing women):* Many of them didn’t even know Jesus, it seems, but mourning was a traditional gesture of women.
- *Soldiers:* They did their job and then sat and waited for the three prisoners to die. They spent the time dividing Jesus’ clothes between themselves by casting lots. They were just doing their job.
- *Watching people:* Throughout history humanity has been strangely (perversely) drawn towards public executions. Apparently people complained in France when the guillotine was introduced as it was too quick and clean. And in the story of Jesus it is no different; the crowds have come out... Were they looking for entertainment or were they just puzzled? Whatever the reasons, by the end of it they were cut to the heart.
- *Sneering rulers:* There is an air of victory in their shouts of: “Save yourself!” Ironically, if Jesus is going to save the people, which the religious leaders would desire if he was the son of God, he cannot save himself.
- *Two criminals:* Criminals literally means “evil-doers”. They were guilty, Luke wants to make this plain. They are both angry with Jesus and then one becomes repentant, pointing out that Jesus, unlike them, has done nothing wrong. Was he hedging his bets when he asked Jesus to remember him? Possibly; but the reality is he was saved immediately (and he didn’t deserve it!).
- *The Centurion:* He had some kind of belief. He says of Jesus that “This was a righteous/innocent man.” Please note that he mutters in the past-tense. Jesus is now dead. It is over...
- *The women who came from Galilee:* They stood at a distance, watching (and wondering?) respectfully.

Did any of these people understand what was going on?

We hear wailing, sneering, shouting, pleading, questioning, and in the midst of it a carpenter prays and forgives all these messed up people! Forgiveness can be difficult to understand, can’t it?

Forgiveness is:

- *Hard:* Those who kid us that we should be “over it by now” have possibly never been truly hurt, or they glide closer to heaven than the likes of me!
- *A process:* We can feel “over” something/someone; healed. And then, a moment later, we are right back at square one. “How did I get here?” we ask ourselves. Forgiveness is something we visit regularly, it seems.
- *Not pushing their wrong-doing under the carpet:* Forgiveness walks hand-in-hand with justice. There is no room for a “martyr’s complex” for the hurt person.
- *Wishing them well in their life, not just letting them off:* Forgiveness is more than ignoring them. It actually means wishing that person well in their life. We want them to be healed and whole. Ouch!

Why forgive swiftly?

This is one of our Church Values. We want to be known as individuals and a people who forgive others swiftly. Why swiftly? Why hang on to all that pain? We know that often unforgiveness hurts us more than the person who has wronged us. They often moved on from the event whilst we sit and pick at the scab of the memory.

Forgiveness is a form of crucifixion:

If we come back to the passage, God’s forgiveness of humanity comes at the expense of Jesus’ life – we receive life through his death. And I think it is the same for us - forgiveness is dying to self so that others may live.

It would be a shame to miss out on this eternal party where God forgives us swiftly; where we can taste the freedom of God’s ‘once and for all’ forgiveness through Jesus on the cross. Let’s help others to not miss out by mirroring God’s forgiveness and forgiving others swiftly as well.

Questions:

1. Imagine yourself at the cross on that day about two thousand years ago. Which of the people are you most like?
2. Do you agree with the comments about what forgiveness is (hard, etc.)?
3. Do you forgive swiftly?
4. What do you think about forgiveness being a form of crucifixion?

Prayer:

Father God, Thank you for forgiving me once and for all. Please help me to live a life of swift forgiveness. Amen.