



Aug.10 Forgiveness: The Divine Answer Part 2

Last week we started a new sermon series on Forgiveness from Adam Hamilton, and the question was raised...what if forgiveness is the answer?

What if forgiveness is the answer to a question we didn't even know to ask. As in, how do we get along better with others in this world, this church, in our families, and even with ourselves?

But life also raises another question – sometimes quietly, deeply in our hearts: When I know I have done something wrong and need forgiveness, what is God's heart toward me?

What is God's heart towards us when we need forgiveness? Do you ever wonder? What picture of God do you carry in your heart of hearts?

Do you imagine God forgiving you grudgingly? Sighing deeply, annoyed at your failure, again? A stern judge?

Maybe you think: What I did wasn't just careless; it was intentional. Willful. Like a cat knocking a glass off the table while staring you in the eye willfully.

And when you imagine a holy God looking at you, maybe you squirm a little. Shame heats your chest. You know God sees your heart and so excuses and half-truths won't cut it. Does your conscience convict you?

So, what then? What is God's heart towards us when we know we need forgiveness?

Because...maybe you have heard this...the longest journey for most of us, is less than two feet? Did you know that?

Often the longest journey a person can take, is maybe 18 inches, moving truth about God from our heads to our hearts.

So, we'll be moving truth down, from our heads down into our hearts, we'll be re-teaching ourselves, re-convincing ourselves and anyone else listening who needs this, ...that our God forgives...readily, graciously, freely, quickly, and fully.

The Lord will always restore us to a state of calm, peace, and with our dignity intact. Our God forgives. Always.

But sometimes God's heart towards us is hard to remember.

Especially when we hear:

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...

And, **“Let the bones you have crushed rejoice.”**

And, **“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”**

I don't know about you, but these words make me shudder; they fill me with dread. My mind goes blank, and I forget God's true heart.

Four years ago, I had a dream so vivid I still remember it.

I want to share this dream I had—dark and unsettling—not because it's comfortable, but because it revealed something I think many of us struggle with deep down.

I dreamt I planted a bomb at a child's birthday party. I knew what I was doing. I watched it go off. And my first thought afterward?

Not grief over the lives lost, but as I came up to my car, destroyed in the blast, I thought angrily to myself, “I should've parked my car farther away.”

And in that dream I remember thinking, **“God will never forgive me for this. My relationship with Him is over.”**

I woke up shaken, realizing my subconscious was testing the boundaries: **Is there something God won't forgive?**

Where do we turn when doubt whispers that God's grace might run out? Is there a limit to God's forgiveness?

Have you ever wondered the same?

The woman caught in adultery didn't wonder if she needed forgiveness. She knew.

At dawn he (meaning Jesus) appeared again in the temple courts and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery.

They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”**

Again, he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman.

Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

She had been caught in the act. No doubt about it, she was guilty. Ripped out of that bed of sin. Rough violent hands grabbed and hauled her through the sleepy streets. (But why not the man too? It takes two.)

But she was guilty, so guilty she wasn't even trying to defend herself. I can't even imagine her intense sense of shame. Her desire to melt into the earth and not even exist anymore.

But they forced her to face the Rabbi, in the Temple Courts of all places. The context, the worst ever! The place where God's holiness was constantly celebrated and defended.

They brought her...to trap Jesus into supporting the Law. It was more about them being right than honoring the law. And they were holding stones big enough to do the job (we have those sized stones on the Altar now), they were just waiting for the word to kill her and destroy Jesus' reputation.

They continued to press, question him loudly, shaking the woman, brandishing their stones, stirring up controversy and inciting the crowd.

But Jesus remained calm, asking the men to reflect on their own sin. Until the men, slowly at first, in one's and two's and then more...drifted away.

All the woman hears through her sobs, with her eyes closed tight in horror of certain death, is the heavy plopping sound of stones being dropped, the crunching sound of sandaled feet walking away, and quiet descends.

And then notice this, Jesus lifting her to her feet, declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” He didn't excuse her sin. But he also didn't define her by it. She was forgiven, restored, lifted up, and sent forward with dignity and hope.

This is God's heart toward us, every time.

And we remember, our Lord is revealing God's heart perfectly. Jesus is calm, compassionate, gentle, not judging, always forgiving...always choosing forgiveness. Always.

Here's another way to think about it, if truth is still making it ways from here (head) to here (heart).

Doctors...the good ones...study medicine for years. They get their undergraduate, medical school, complete their grueling residency. Not so they can go around telling people, **“Well, the problem is YOU ARE SICK! That’s the problem, yep!”**

No, it is so they can help us heal.

Pastors...the good ones...don't spend years and years studying...getting their undergraduate, masters learning Greek...UGH!, just so they can walk around and declare, **“Well, the problem is YOU ARE A SINNER!” “Sinner!”**

No.

A thousand times no.

No, it's because we've met a God who forgives - quickly and graciously, forgives, always. And we want to give that away, just that one truth about God, taken to heart, would heal this world, and heal our wounded souls.

And yet we are still learning this.

During the Annual Conference right after Covid, our first in person conference for a couple of years, a bunch of us pastors had gotten together at one table. We began visiting, we were relieved to be back in person, a little squirrel-LY.

And then somehow, the tone changed, comments were taken personally, suddenly hurtful words flew. And I joined in! Things calmed down, we moved on, but still kinda wondering, **“What in the world had just happened to us...basically normal people?!”**

I kept replaying words I said. So, a couple of days later, I called and left a message...wondering if this person was hurt by what I said, hope we can talk things through and asked for forgiveness.

Half a day later, she called back and was like, **“Huh?” I have no idea what you are talking about! I don't remember you saying anything needing forgiveness. We are fine.”**

This is just like our relationship with God...except probably, more often than not, God agrees with our assessment. That what we said or did wasn't all that acceptable. It wasn't okay.

But then we ask for forgiveness...and then God washes our hearts clean. And the relief, the restoration, and peace floods our soul.

Remember what Jesus taught, **“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”**. Reminding his disciples, God forgives.

Remember...Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery.

Jesus forgave the tax collector Zacchaeus.

He forgave them.

At the Last Supper, he took wine and said to his disciples, **“Drink this cup, for it is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.”**

As he hung on the cross, he prayed for those who were putting him to death, the ultimate in forgiveness, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”**

And finally, after his resurrection, he came to his disciples and commanded them to forgive sins saying, **“Whomever you forgive, I forgive.”**

The Christian faith isn't just about forgiveness. It IS forgiveness. God forgives. Jesus came to secure for us perfect forgiveness for all sins, for all of us, forever.

The hardest part isn't hearing that God forgives. It's believing it—letting it travel from your head into your heart. Let it travel on down, let it sink in...real good. Let it take root in your heart.

Because once it does, we have something real to give away. We have something powerful and beautiful to give to others who have yet to experience God's forgiveness for themselves.

May the Spirit help us hear, right now, hear Jesus' words for our own hearts...Jesus speaking this directly to your heart, **“Child, where are they? Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you, Go now and leave your life of sin.”** Amen.

Time of Reflection: 1. What picture of God do you carry in your heart when you think about forgiveness—and how might Jesus' words, “Neither do I condemn you,” reshape that picture?

2. What would it look like for the truth of God's complete forgiveness to travel from your head to your heart this week?