13 years ago this week, we experienced one of the most horrific days in this history of this country. More than 3,000 innocent lives were taken amidst the cloud of ashes and dust with millions more whose lives were traumatized and have never been the same. The memory of that fateful day of 9/11/01 remains vivid on all of our minds. “*We Will Never Forget, We Will Never Forget”,* as many of us reminded ourselves of on this day of remembrance.

Sadl, on the eve of this somber anniversary 13 years later, America still finds itself to be on the brink of war against the forces of evil and renews its commitment and resolve to defeat this “evil” enemy once and for all. Certainly we have not forgotten….nor have we forgiven either.

As Christians, we wrestle with this bi-polar syndrome day-in and day-out. How can we forgive someone who hurts us and stabs us right in our hearts? It seems Jesus’s teaching of “loving our enemies” and “turning the other cheek” may be too unrealistic to achieve in a seemingly unjust world where evil is rampant. How far can we draw the fine line morally and ethically, while restraining our thoughts and our actions? Where is God in the midst of all of this? Doesn’t God know that the innocent people are suffering? Doesn’t God even care? Can we really forgive those who have sinned against us?

The two passages that we read earlier are continuations of the passages from last week. If you recall from last week, the focus was about how we must strive to tolerate one another, in the midst of our differences. This week, we’re stepping up a notch. Instead of just coping with our differences, Peter asked Jesus how many times we must forgive someone. How realistic can we easily “forgive and forget” when someone betrayed our friendship, hurt our feelings and stabbed us behind our back?

As we read from Paul’s letter to the early church in Rome, the early Christians were not exempt from conflicts and differences. The early church was as messy as we are with many schisms, divisions and conflicts as we have in our churches today. They had their share of their differences in terms of their languages, cultural upbringings, socio-economic backgrounds, the food that they eat and the way they practiced their faith. Many would have no trouble recognizing the *specks in their neighbors’ eyes, but* *failing to* *notice the log in their own eyes?[[1]](#footnote-1)* But yet somehow, through their common faith in Christ, they were called to seek ways to cope and to co-exist with one another. They must learn to “forgive and forget” in the name of Christ for the sake of unity of the body.

When Peter asked Jesus how many times that one should forgive his brothers, he wasn’t looking for a numerical answer. **The number 7, as you know, is a sign of perfection and wholeness.** When Jesus mentioned that we should forgive those who sinned against us 77 times or 70 times 7, Jesus of course didn’t mean it literally, but metaphorically that we should forgive **wholeheartedly** and **unconditionally**. It’s about the magnitudes and the degree of latitude at which grace is being extended.

**Forgiveness is not just a one-time act, but rather a discipline developed and nurtured from the heart. It tests one’s inner restraint from seeking vengeance while striving toward a peaceful and mutual resolution in good faith.**

The Apostle Paul reminded us that whether we live or die, we are the LORD’s. Christ is what binds us all together, whether we agree with one another. Ultimately we must all stand before the judgment throne of God. Let God be the judge of our trespasses while we do our parts, to carry out God’s mission of compassion, grace and love to all God’s people.

Before I go any further, I would guide us all through a little exercise. Part of forgiving another person is to learn to manage our own emotion and anger. I would like you all to think of a person (or a group of people) whom you hated the most right now? Perhaps it may be one of your co-workers, your boss, your neighbor across the street, your siblings, your spouse or even your parent. What did that person do to you that anger you so much? What has that person done to you that deserve your hate and bitterness towards him or her? Is this something that you can manage personally or is this something that’s beyond your control?

In spite of all the hurtful things that that person might have said or done to you, God challenges us to carry out a noble but not impossible act...to forgive that person! God challenges us to let go and let God by placing our hearts upon that person. Pray for that person for healing and for the change of heart. Pray that the Holy Spirit may bind your open wounds and your broken hearts. Release the vengeance and the bitterness that have been storing up in your heart. Let it go! and Let God!

In his book “*Letting God of the Role of Victim”,* Rabbi Harold Kushner described a woman from his congregation who was having a difficult time of letting go and forgiving her former husband who had abused and abandoned her. Rabbi Kushner wrote:

*“A woman in my congregation comes to see me. She is a single mother, divorced, working to support herself and three young children. She says to me, “Since my husband walked out on us, every month is a struggle to pay our bills. I have to tell my kids we have no money to go to the movies, while he’s living it up with his new wife in another state. How can you tell me to forgive him?’ I answer her, “I’m not asking you to forgive him because what he did was acceptable. It wasn’t; it was mean and selfish. I’m asking you to forgive because he doesn’t deserve the power to live in your head and turn you into a bitter angry woman. I’d like to see him out of your life emotionally as completely as he is out of it physically, but you keep holding on to him. You’re not hurting him by holding on to that resentment, but you’re [only] hurting yourself.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Sometimes all it takes it is a simple prayer of letting go and letting God. Pray that God will liberate you from the spiteful of hate and vengeance. Cast your care upon God and God will bring you peace and set you free.

In times when there’s a great division and schism within the body, it calls upon us to take even greater courage and risks to confront with those harder issues that no one wants to talk about. However, the only way which we can honestly confront the situation is by addressing it head-on, in a healthy and constructive manner.

Forgiveness is a necessary first-step towards healing a fractured society and striving towards a more utopian one, with Christ as the head and we as member of the body. As Christ reminded us that *if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now we are [all] the body of Christ and individually members of it.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

When it comes to forgiveness, how easily have we forgotten what Jesus commanded to us? Jesus demonstrated what He preached by the ultimate act of grace and forgiveness upon the cross. With His final breath, He prayed to the Father in Heaven, “*Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”[[4]](#footnote-4)* Christ prayed for the forgiveness of all of us, those who have sinned against Him. And He’s asking us to do likewise to others.

**Unlike the God’s grace and love which is unconditional, God’s forgiveness IS contingent upon OUR proper response in forgiving others**. **Jesus calls upon us to be extremists in this world by exercising God’s radical love and forgiveness towards others, over hatred and vengeance.**

**Instead of conforming to the norms of society, to go with the flow or to declare our own self-righteousness, God challenges us to be transformed and be renewed. God invites us to take a bold leap of faith by chartering ourselves into deeper water - to be God’s witnesses, and to be the Salt and Light of the world.**

What does the LORD require of us? But to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.[[5]](#footnote-5)

No longer shall we “forget to forgive”, but instead we would give forth the light of Christ in a world that is full of darkness. Through Christ, God has given us the fullness of God’s grace, peace and love. God has equipped us with the courage to speak the truth through our humility, compassion and forgiveness towards others. Friends, this is the good news and the hope that the world has been longing for. Thanks be to God.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Matthew 7:3-5* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Harold S. Kushner, *“Letting Go of the Role of Victim”* Spirituality and Health, Winter 1999, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *I Corinthians 12:26-27* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 23:34* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Micah 6:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)