Earlier this week, our nation commemorated the 16th anniversary of 9/11. More than 3,000 lives were taken amidst the cloud of ashes and dust with millions more whose lives were traumatized and dramatically altered. The memory of that fateful day remains vivid on many of our minds. Many posted slogan like “*We Will Never Forget”* in honor of those loved ones who were taken from us.

 Sadly, 16 years later, America still finds herself on the brink of war against the forces of evil. We might not have forgotten but have we forgiven those who did us harm emotionally and psychologically?

 To forget is easy but to forget is much harder. It is much harder to forgive than to forget. One can forget simply by ignoring it and pretend it’s not there. Over time, you may forget. But to forgive requires intentional effort of reaching out to the others involved. Forgiveness needs to be initiated but it also needs to be received. It is a reciprocal act.

As Christians, we wrestle with this concept of forgiveness day-in and day-out. We know to forgive someone is the right thing to do, yet it is the hardest thing to do also. How can we forgive someone who hurts us, talks behind and stabs us on our backs? It seems Jesus’s teaching of “loving our enemies” and “turning the other cheek” may be too utopian for us to follow through.

In the two passages that we read earlier guided us to focus on how we must strive to tolerate one another, in the midst of our differences, especially someone who disrespected us or hurt us. Instead of just coping with our differences, Peter asked Jesus how many times we must forgive someone. Are 7 times enough??? 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 the many conflicts and differences. The early church was just as messy as we are with many schisms, divisions and conflicts that we have 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, and likewise we have ours. Many would have no problem recognizing the *specks in their neighbors’ eyes, but* *failing to* *notice the log in their own eyes?[[1]](#footnote-1)* However, through their common faith in Christ, they were called to seek ways to cope and tolerate one another in spite of their differences. 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 have sinned against us 77 times or 70 times 7, Jesus of course didn’t mean it quite literally, but metaphorically that we should forgive **wholeheartedly** and **unconditionally**. It’s about the magnitude and our attitude towards which grace is to be 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 we die, we are the LORD’s. That’s important!!! Christ is our common denominator that brings us all as one. Ultimately we all must 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, peace, and justice to all of God’s people.

 Part of forgiving another person is to learn to manage our own emotion and anger. In spite of the many hurtful things that we might have said or done to each other, God challenges each of us to carry out a more 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 up our open wounds and our 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 are great division and schism within the body, it calls upon us to take even greater risks in confronting those harder issues that no one wants to talk about. We need to address the elephant that’s in the room! However, the only way which we can honestly confront the situation is by addressing it head-on, in a healthy and constructive manner, as we talked about last week.

Forgiveness is only the necessary first-step towards healing a fractured society and striving towards a more utopian one, if we only do our parts, 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)*

 **No matter how great or how petty the debt of our sins may be, Christ has paid for us all through his work on the cross.** Christ demonstrated what He preached by the ultimate act of grace and forgiveness. With His final breath, He prayed to his and our Father in Heaven, **“*Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”[[4]](#footnote-4)***

The same prayer that Christ lifted up for us, shall also be our prayers for all those who have sinned against us, as Christ taught us to pray “forgive our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.”

 **For much have we been forgiven, much we shall forgive others. Let us NOT forget that!** **Unlike God’s grace and love which is unconditional, God’s forgiveness IS contingent upon OUR proper response in forgiving others**. **Christ has called upon us to exercise this radical love, compassion, and forgiveness towards others that can overcome human hatred and vengeance.**

 What does the LORD require of us? But to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.[[5]](#footnote-5) **Instead of conforming with and sailing along with the waves of society, God has challenged us to be transformed by the renewing of our hearts and our minds. God has invited us to take this leap of faith by chartering ourselves into deeper water - to be God’s witnesses, and to be the Salt and Light of the world.**

Friends, no longer shall we “forget to forgive”, but through Christ, God has given us the fullness of God’s grace. God has equipped us with the courage to speak the truth through our humility, compassion and forgiveness towards others. 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)