

“Did Jesus Really Mean That? Forgive as I Forgive”

Matthew 6:9-15, Ephesians 4:32 (NLT)

May 5, 2019

Rev. Dave Baldrige

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

A story by Ernest Hemingway: “No one could really say why he ran away. Or perhaps he didn’t, but was kicked out of his home by his father for something foolish that he said or did. Either way, Paco found himself wandering the streets of Madrid, Spain with hopes of entering into a profession that would most likely get him killed – bullfighting. Those who train under a mentor have a good chance of surviving this profession, but Paco’s memory of his mistakes and guilt over what happened blindly drove him to this one-way street to suicide.”

But that was the last thing his father wanted, which is why he tried something desperate which he desperately hoped would work. There was little to no chance that he would be able to find Paco by wandering the streets of Madrid, so instead he put an advertisement in the local newspaper *El Liberal*. The advertisement read,

*“Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa.”*

Paco is such a common name in Spain that when the father went to the Hotel Montana the next day at noon there were 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers...and waiting for the forgiveness they never thought was possible!”

(From the short story *The Capital of the World* by Ernest Hemingway in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*)

How important forgiveness is. We crave forgiveness. However, why is it we are much more ready to receive forgiveness than to give it?

Did Jesus really mean it when He said, “Forgive as I have Forgiven.” Who and how does Jesus forgive? Does He really expect us to forgive as He did?

These are tough questions in our series, “Did Jesus Really Mean That?” Next week, I especially want to invite you to come as we ask the same question, “Did Jesus Really Mean That? When He said “Go the extra mile.” It’s Mother’s Day. And certainly mothers, in my opinion go the extra mile. But I’m especially excited because a mother by the name of Sarah Baldrige will be preaching at all 3 services. I think you will be blessed as she shares God’s word with us.

Every week at all of our services we pray the Lord’s prayer. The scripture you heard this morning from Matthew 6 is where we get the Lord’s prayer. Also, we find a version of it in Luke chapter 11. So, each week we say it (on communion Sundays we often sing it the end of our service at our first two services---which we will do today). I question if the words that come out of our mouth when we say the Lord’s prayers are simply words coming from memory. Are they just words, or do we think and literally pray and mean what we are saying?

I must confess I often fall into the trap of saying the Lord’s Prayer without thinking of what I’m saying. It’s like a remote control...Lord’s Prayer...and the words just come out.

Okay another confession, while I'm on a roll...sometimes as I pray the Lord's Prayer, I'm checking my notes, looking at what is coming next, double checking my microphone. You have probably seen me do that. Hold it...if you have seen me do that when we pray the Lord's Prayer that means you are not focusing on the words either. Aha, caught you!!!!

And every week we pray <sup>12</sup> **and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.** Or as we say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Did we really hear what we said/prayed? It doesn't say, "Forgive us our sins," and then go on to the next part of the prayer. It says, "Forgive us our sins AS we have forgiven those who sin against us."

I would much rather receive forgiveness than give it. When someone sins against me I have several reactions. I am angry, I am hurt, and to be honest my strong human side comes out and I want revenge and payback. They hurt me or someone I love and I want to hurt them back. Anybody else felt that way? I don't want a show of hands, but can I get at least an Amen from somebody out there.

Now let me address something that sometimes we confuse with forgiveness, and that is the phrase "Forgive and forget." Beloved that phrase is NOT in the Bible. Oh, there is much about forgiveness. Now as I proceed in life and begin to slightly age with gray hair, creaks in my bones, etc. I have found that sometimes I do forget. Xxx Where was I? xxx What was I talking about? Oh yeah----forgive and forget. Beloved we can forgive but it does not mean "I will act as if the sin had never occurred and live as if I don't remember it." To be honest that is basically humanly impossible.

Let me give a very simple example. If my dog gets out of the house and hides behind my neighbor's car and backs the car out and doesn't see my dog it could result in the dog's death. Now I could forgive my neighbor, but I have still lost my dog. I cannot forget that my dog is gone.

Now let's go a lot deeper, and this is hard. What if you or a loved one has had something happen to you or them that is tragic and life altering. Abuse, harassment, abandonment, innocent one being killed by drunk driver or by a shooter. How in the world can I forgive? I sit in awe of those reports of a family member who says to the media "I forgive." Wow...only by the power and grace of God.

For me, if someone has deeply wronged me or my family, I don't want to see them again. I am angry. In fact, I want to hurt them because they have hurt me or my family. I am bitter, and I weep that they have affected my life or the life of my loved one like they have. What they have done has life long lasting effects...I don't want to forgive them.

In my own life there has been a time where I have had a hard time praying, "Lord I forgive xxxx?" To be honest I don't even want to pray that prayer. I have a hard time because to be honest, I don't want to forgive.

They have hurt me or my loved one and I have a right to be mad and angry. They shouldn't have done what they did. They took advantage. They lied. They manipulated. When they acted that way, why should I forgive?

Sometimes, at least for me forgiveness is a process. I have to go through my range of emotions. I then realize I can only forgive, even though I hate the situation and what has happened because Jesus has the power to help me forgive. Now, just because I forgive doesn't mean I forget what has happened. It doesn't mean that I don't have to still deal with my emotions. I have had to say it over and over again, "I forgive, I forgive, I forgive." There have been times where it has taken me yes months or years to even get to that point of asking God to forgive someone that has wronged me or my family.

Forgiveness is not easy. There are people here that have had some bad things happen to them or their family. For me, I like to put it on the top shelf and try to forget about it and not deal with it. But you know what, eventually I have to deal with it. To be honest the hurt may be so deep it may require counseling (remember that Rev. Cathy is a licensed therapist and we have Amanda Hawkins on staff that is also a licensed therapist who also does counseling). It maybe you need to seek out a counselor to help you deal with your feelings, resentment, anger and begin a process of forgiveness.

You see I have said the Lord's Prayers for years; do I really want God to forgive me of my sins AS I forgive those who have sinned against me.

And then I find the scripture after what we call the Lord's prayer to be a real tough one. The Lord's Prayer ends in our scripture in Matthew 6:13. But now look at the two verses following that.

**<sup>14</sup> "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."**

Surely Jesus didn't mean that. Well, here it is clearly in the Bible so I'm guessing that yes, He did really mean that. If we refuse to forgive others...then God won't forgive us. Oh my. But Lord you don't understand. What has happened to me is very painful. How can I forgive what someone has done to me that was so wrong?

I pause to say that Jesus on the cross said, "Father forgive them..." Jesus had been falsely accused, betrayed by a friend, religious people were against Him. And yet he said, "Father forgive..."

I can only forgive by God's help. It is not within my own power to do that, and it is tough, it is hard, it is difficult.

A powerful true example that I have used before is the story of the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II.

It is the actual event of Pope John Paul II and Mehmet Ali Ağca. You see on May 13, 1981 this Turkish born man shot the Pope at point blank range while the pontiff was riding in an open car across St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. Mehmet Ali Ağca, who had escaped from a Turkish prison after receiving a life sentence for murdering a journalist, fired four shots with a 9-millimeter pistol.

Two struck the pope in his lower intestine, one in his right arm and one in his left index finger. Two bystanders were also wounded.

### **(Image of Pope being helped)**

The critically wounded pope was rushed to a hospital in Rome where the doctors were able to save his life.

The Pope's personal secretary said that en route to the hospital the Pope said, "I forgive the assassin." Three days into his 20-day hospitalization John Paul II released a public statement including the words, "Pray for the brother who shot me, whom I have sincerely forgiven."

Two and a half years later the pope paused in the midst of his hectic Christmas schedule to physically show the forgiveness he professed.

On December 27, 1983, the pope visited his assailant in person and indicated he held no hate in his heart toward him.

### **(Image of Pope in jail cell with attempted assassin)**

John Paul II recounted their meeting and reflected on his hope that the prisoner would experience more to life. "Ali Ağca as I believe understood, that above his power, the power of shooting and killing, there is a greater power. He began looking for it. I wish for him that he finds it."

(Greg Asimakopoulos, Naperville, Illinois, source: [www.SydneyMorningHerald.com](http://www.SydneyMorningHerald.com) (2-18-05, and from book Memory and Identify)

### **(image of Pope shaking hands with Ali Ağca)**

The pope stayed in touch with Ağca's family during the latter's incarceration, and in 2000 requested that he be pardoned.

Mehmet Ali Ağca spent three decades behind bars for attempting to assassinate Pope John Paul II. 33 years later Mehmet Ali Ağca made a pilgrimage to the Vatican, the very place where he tried to take the former Pope's life.

(other sources for this story, Man Who Tried To Assassinate Pope John Paul II Returns To Leave Roses on Tomb, by Paula Mejia ON 12/28/14; 1981-1983, Violence and forgiveness, by Alex Q. Arbuckle, Mashable)

**(video from BBC, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5nZ2YGKzI0> )**

"Long live Jesus Christ the only redeemer in the world." A miracle of forgiveness.

**Ephesians 4:31 New Living Translation (NLT) <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.**

Except for the working of the Holy Spirit and the powerful presence of God can we get rid of the bitterness, rage and anger in order to forgive. Right after this verse Paul wrote these words:

**Ephesians 4:32 New Living Translation (NLT) <sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.**

Instead of bitterness, rage and anger...forgive one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Did Jesus really mean that? To forgive like that. Not easy. It's personal. It hurts.

(video: <https://www.sermonspice.com/product/50916/forgiveness> )

Today come receive the cup of forgiveness. Today begin the process of forgiving others.