

Sermon Text for March 12, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 25:6-11, Romans 4:1-8

“When forgiveness hurts”

So as I was driving home yesterday from the confirmation class retreat where we had a great time of going over all that we had learned as well as learned new things about the nature and love of God, it was beautiful as we were driving home, Taylor Swift was playing, it is the only CD that I have in my car, and it seemed very removed from a Lent that is leading to the crucifixion and death of our Savior. We had a celebration, we had joy, we had fun, we had seasons in the sun. But driving home yesterday Taylor Swift seemed liked a fitting ending, but thinking about you all today and how we are faced with another death in Gary Myer, I thought of my message that I had prepared for Lent for all of you. When forgiveness hurts. It almost seemed like a non-sequiter, until I remembered that last week we looked at the original sin, the sin that we claim as our own, our own sin. The other side to last week’s message, is what happens when you are on the receiving end of that sin, how do we, and how can we forgive?

It seems that the older we get the harder it is to remember things. We say this sometimes in jest, but I’m someone who in 10 years will be the same age as his dad who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s at that age. We have to have things in our lives that spark a memory that allows us to say, oh yeah, now I remember. It reminds me of a diagnosis that a friend of mine who was having trouble with memory received from a doctor who said: You suffer from a severe brain disorder. On the left side of your brain there is nothing right, and on your right side there is nothing left.

I personally know the importance of memory and it is attested throughout Scripture that there is a very close connections between memory and forgiveness. That’s right, memory and forgiveness. Forgiveness is based upon God having a very strong memory and also partial amnesia. Did you hear the psalmist play that back and forth? He states: remember your mercy and your steadfast love, but forget my sins. Remember your steadfast love O Lord. Some of us are accused at times of selective hearing, or listening. Well, here the psalmist, and also Paul we will see, is asking God to have selective memory so that we can be forgiven.

How many of us have remember what God has actually done so that we can be forgiven? It is so easy to say, it rolls right off the tongue, in Jesus Christ we are all

forgiven. But what has happened that allows us to say that, and obviously to believe that? It is easy for us to forget the pain, the hurt that Christ had to experience in order for us to be forgiven. When we forget at what cost we received our forgiveness, we can also easily forget that our lives ought to be filled with forgiveness for others that at times hurts. Let's remember that in our second reading this morning.

READ SCRIPTURE

As we were driving out to Karen Cooper's cabin for the retreat we passed by a few exits for Gettysburg. I have never been there to see the battlefield. I have also never been to the 9-11 memorial in Central PA for the plane that went down. I would love to go and see both of those places. But I have been to all the places in Philadelphia, Valley Forge, moving West and the Alamo, and other places all over our country where we have erected memorials for events and occurrences that have happened in our nation's history. I've been to Atlanta to see all of Martin Luther King Jr.'s sites, his church, his home.

Each of these places, and many others like them in our nation's history, have memorials that are erected that remind us of what has happened and are supposed to inspire us to live in the ideals that were put forward by a person or learn from the lessons that were taught at that place. Did you know that children at a very young age obtain something that is called object permanence. Do you know what that is? It is a term that describes what happens to a child when you take their toy and put it behind their back and they think it has disappeared. An important phase in their life is when they are able to recognize that the object that they cannot see, actually exists. Until that time it is out of sight, out of mind, and in fact, it does not even exist. That's why peekaboo is so funny. Because you had disappeared, or at least your eyes had, and then poof, they have appeared again.

Throughout Scripture we find people of faith who suffer from a lack of object permanence. Their mind is not able to remember, much less comprehend that if something or someone is gone, then that person and their teachings are not actually gone. Think of the lack of object permanence that the people of Israel suffered when Moses went up to the mountain to receive the ten commandments. As soon as he was gone they asked Aaron to build something to take his place, and they broke the commandments even before God was able to give them to them. Think of Jesus and his disciples as soon as he was dead the disciples go and lock their doors, go back to fishing and forget that

Jesus is still alive. Their salvation was predicated upon the presence of Jesus. Jesus comes back and tells them no, your faith has made you well, not my physical presence.

Likewise, we are forgiven, but unless we remind ourselves of what that means, of the price, then we are likely to go on in our lives forgetting our forgiveness and forgetting that we ought to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us. Paul begins in Romans by going back to one of the most important memories in the history of the Jewish people: Father Abraham. Do you remember Abraham? He was righteous not because of what he did, he was forgiven not because of his works, but because he remembered who he was in respect to God and believed that God was able to work in his life. As Paul quotes from Genesis 16 Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. His life was a walk down memory lane as he remembered what God had done for him and what he in turn must do for God.

Likewise as the New Testament community we remember the price that Christ had to pay for our forgiveness. If we forget the hurt on the cross, then we can forget how important it is. We take our forgiveness as if it is something due to us, like wages, as Paul states because of what we have done or even because of what we believe. Our forgiveness is a result of God's grace that was so powerful that Jesus had to die, had to suffer, had to hurt. The psalmist states that we are forgiven because our sins are covered at great cost and sacrifice. This covering was in Christ's blood and not our own. We are not forgiven because we have done some good works, or because we walked down the aisle at age 7, but rather it is God who reckoned us through what Jesus Christ did, as righteousness.

But we want to boast of our faith. We want to tell people about how many we have brought to Christ so that we can get the credit and people will say what a good worker you are. Paul says not even Abraham, the pioneer of our faith, was able to boast so who do we think we are to be able to boast?

Let us never forget the one whose act of forgiveness hurt him so much that he had to give his life for us. He was a non-combatant who laid down his life for us. Our forgiveness was not painless, it hurt. Forgiveness hurts when it strikes close to home. We are more than willing to accept it, but do we recognize at what cost we are accepting it? Paul tells us blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. We are the blessed and the Lord will not reckon our sin.

Today, let us take a walk down memory lane and remember how we are forgiven and whether we allow that forgiveness that we experience in Christ to reflect in our lives. We must remember that a nation who forgets the past is destined to repeat it. At a personal level a people who forget that they are forgiven are destined not to forgive others.

Do we forgive others as our father in heaven forgives us? We seem to forget that part as well as the Scripture that states that we ought to forgive other 70x7 times. Forgiveness hurts when it is up to us to forgive. It feels great when we receive it, but how often we forget at what price we were able to receive. Jesus Christ on the cross we worship and obey even when it hurts because of his forgiveness and the earthly and spiritual freedoms that we receive from him.

When Jesus was arrested Peter took a sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Do you remember what Jesus did? He healed the ear of the guard and told Peter: no more of this. No more of this. Forgiveness is when God looks at our suffering and our pain and states no more of this and sends his son to die for us. Forgiveness is when we in turn are able to say to those who are suffering and in pain, no more of this.

Our forgiveness hurt Christ tremendously, but it gave us life. Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered, blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin. Amen.