

FORGIVENESS...OH, BOY! (MT 18:21-25)
Sermon by the Rev. Corinne Hodges
Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008, SJOC

The sermon was preached using the outline below.

- I. Vestry meeting and forgiveness, “Oh boy!”
 - A. Subject of forgiveness is difficult one, but one we all can relate to
 - B. It’s interesting how sometimes we can forgive rather easily, but others, “Oh boy!”

- II. Instance 1: Charlie stealing diary & sharing with neighbors
 - A. Eventually saw his wrong, apologized and I forgave
 - B. One-time events make it easier
 - C. Fact he was my brother, that I loved him, that he never did anything like that again helped

- III. More difficult instance
 - A. Colleague hurt me—his actions had lead me to distrust him, when it was clear our relationship was strained, we sat down to talk, shared feelings, in fact had a couple discussions, apologies given
 - B. Would love to tell you that this was the end of it, we were able to move on, that our relationship was healed
 - C. Fact is: never quite the same. We got along, but lost that closeness

- IV. Why is it that in one case a relationship can be restored and in another it cannot?
 - A. True forgiveness is hard work
 - 1. Big versus small forgivenesses like in the Gospel
 - 2. Forgive often: Gospel says 77 or 490 times (as many times as needed) Takes effort, patience “Have patience with me” 2x
 - B. Forgiveness “from the heart”
 - 1. More than words, conversation and dialogue
 - 2. Softening of the heart, a loosening, opening, it comes from within
 - 3. Unconditional, no tallies or accounting
 - 4. Requires a change of lifestyle, always living with a forgiving, non-judging heart

- V. So often in forgiveness we are focused on the other person, what they did or did not do to us
 - A. But the power to forgive or to ask for forgiveness and move on often lies within ourselves

- B. “The Anxious Organization” by Jeffrey Miller: Take responsibility for ourselves. “To cease blaming others for our own anxiety, even when we can see that their behaviors contribute to it. Instead we have to FOCUS ON OUR OWN CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROBLEM AND CHANGE THE ONLY THING THAT IS IN OUR POWER TO CHANGE— OURSELVES.”
 - C. I had to own my own resentment and bitterness
 - D. I was creating my own anxiety by not forgiving
 - E. When I realized this, I knew that it was time to let go, like the unforgivable servant, I was causing my own pain
- VI. One more thought: how this all affects our relationship with God
- A. When we do not forgive, we hurt the other person, ourselves, but also our relationship with God, the whole body of Christ
 - B. When we close our hearts off to another person, we close them off to God
 - C. In my own case, when I have struggled with forgiveness, I know that I have prayed A LOT!
 - D. I start praying for the other person, but then I also realize that I myself need prayers to forgive or ask forgiveness. I turn to God for help
- VII. What does true forgiveness look like? Have you seen it?
- A. Joseph with his brothers—after years of conflict, deceit, arrogance, jealousy, coming together in forgiveness—tears of joy and relief
 - B. Could not erase the history of what had happened, torn them apart
 - C. Somehow able to come to an understanding, establish a new kind of relationship and discover peace
- VIII. The message of forgiveness is at the heart of who we are as Christians
- A. In our liturgy, it’s not just a coincidence that we confess our sins against God and our neighbor right before we share the sign of peace
 - B. Or that we say the Lord’s prayer with the line “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” right before we share in the Lord’s Supper/Communion
 - C. God is generous and loving in forgiving sins great and small. The tally is swept clean. The accounts are settled. As a sign of our gratitude, we can do the same.