

FORGIVENESS - Circle of Care Meeting

Facilitator

candle

First, let's pray

"Our Holy Comforter, our true friend, be with us, Lord, in our vulnerability and in our listening to each other. Spread your branches for restful shade as we share and explore what it means to live under a multitude of branches of grace you have so freely provided." Amen.

silence

Think about a time you forgave someone- (how did it happen? how long? where was God?)

Think about a time someone forgave you. (How did you feel? what did it do to you?) If we all have goodness in us by our divine interior life, then we can see that all error, whether we call it sin or mistake can be forgiven. You're living proof. Then why is it so hard? (bc it's not ours to do)

Let's look at one story in scripture and some related words as they pertain to "the way we treat each other" and then experience an exercise together.

will someone read the story of Joseph meeting his brothers in Egypt from Genesis?

Does everyone remember this story?

Gen. 45:3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Gen. 45:4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be

distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt...

Gen. 45:15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

It seems to me that Joseph forgave when he didn't think he could- didn't see it coming....Imagine it for a second...

Let's look at the handout

Who forgives and what is forgiveness, anyway?

"Mercy" (Hebrew) in the OT:

racham: to have compassion, love (Gen. 43- Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with racism for his brother and he was about to weep)

chanan: to show favor (the Lord make his face shine upon you and be chanan to you)

techinnah: supplication

For faithful Jews, mercy meant loving someone through acts of compassion. And love is easier than forgiving. It flows downward, like water, gravity takes love to the places it needs to be.

"Mercy" (Greek) in the NT: eleos: to show mercy in most of NT but predominantly the Gospel of Mark and Paul's letters eleeo: mercy

in most of NT but predominantly Paul's letter to the Romans

Christ followers knew their Torah scripture and echoed it back when they used the word mercy- these greek words translate as mercy, which in the OT means acting on love, not forgiveness. Mercy was about showing love.

So then who forgives? Let's look at the word forgiveness: "Forgiveness" (Hebrew) in the OT: *nasah*: to lift, carry, take- very bodily, visceral (Gen. 18:26 And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." in Torah and Psalms and wisdom literature *salach*: to forgive in later books of Torah *kafar*: to cover, make atonement in Psalms and wisdom literature. Forgiveness was what erasing debt was- a real thing to the Jewish people. all over the levitical code, of course.

"Forgiveness" (Greek) in the NT: *aphesis*: forgiveness, release, remission spans the NT (It's what we use in the Lord's Prayer- to release our debts and even more surprisingly, we ask God to forgive like we forgive each other-wipe clean the debt of those who owe us. This is not saying we should forgive sinners as God forgives or as in Mark 11:25-Release whatever you may have down on someone, in order that your father in heaven may release your trespasses. There is nothing really emotional about this word again. It is a cancellation of balances due. *charisomai*: to give, favor, forgive in Paul's letters.

Here again, we see the NT word just reflecting back the OT definition. Both Greek words for forgiveness in the texts are literally translated as forgiveness, assuming that the reader knows the working OT definition saying that it still applies. To lift a debt or make atonement. Whose job is forgiveness if we are just supposed to cancel balances? So, then, what are we supposed to do? Any thoughts?

Grace is what forgives and that belongs to God alone. God shows God's forgiveness in the sending of Jesus. Your work to forgive hinges on finding the forgiveness within yourself that is already there. The way to do that is through continuing to love cuz that is what Jesus says to do, through the hurt. This is reconciliation. Does this all make any sense?

We might see...

- Forgiveness is not a work done by us
- Forgiveness as a gift of grace, but not defined as mercy (to be gracious is to be graced, which is a gift of the HS- it descends lifting away anger, resentment, etc. The experience then is not forgotten but it no longer has the power it did. If aphasis is the word for release, then it is we who are released- not by our own doing, but by God's action in us and for us.)
- God instructs us to actively love while we wait for transformation. Does this take away the shame of not being able to get over it? Because there's all these "What abouts..." What about if someone killed your family member? Abuse? Neglect? "Just do it!" is poor theology and psychology to me. In loving actively, we safeguard against letting our hearts turn bitter by what has not yet been let go of. It's about how we as people can treat each other while we are hurting, which we'll look to Jesus for instructions on.

I'd like to read what Pamela Cooper-White- professor at Columbia Theological Seminary has to say about this very same topic which I could not say better.

"If forgiveness is God's job to do, and a gift of grace that we may receive but not forcefully achieve by our own effort, we no longer need to push forgiveness onto others or ourselves! We may or may not ever feel as though we have forgiven those who have harmed us, but we can stop punishing ourselves and others for legitimate negative feelings of hurt, anger, humiliation, and grief. As we allow our feelings to flow through us, without self-recrimination or judgement, we may find the we have new freedom, because we are no longer using our energy to suppress emotions that we thought were un-Christian. In fact, the so-called "negative" emotions of hurt and anger can be channeled into acts of compassion for others who have been wounded and collaborative actions with other Christians for constructive social change. Finally, as we re-shift our attention away from forgiveness as the central theme of our theology, we can be freed to engage in prophetic witness to the already-not yet reconciliation that God is calling forth from all creation and an end to violence in all its forms."

Then what is our job?

And I know this is hard bc we loved the movie the Shack where Papa tells the dad to keep on workin' on that forgiveness, and we read Amish Grace where the whole Nickel Mines community forgave the active shooter right away. This is different. It's a shift.

Let's see if we can get some of these down on paper.

Can someone scribe for us? (copy and discuss) then...

I'd like to add this thought by Sam Wells. Loving someone while there is discord means carefully following the words of Jesus. 1) Do good to those who hate you. 2) Bless those who hate you. 3) Pray for those who abuse you. 4) Offer the other cheek. 5) Don't withhold your shirt. 6) Give to everyone who begs. Don't ask for your property back. When we reach the end of this list, we realize that what we have is what is about to happen to Jesus as he utters these prescriptives. Jesus went to the cross because he loved his enemies. And when it was time, after all of these things had occurred, Jesus asks for the Father to forgive his transgressors. He LOVED them. Then he asked for their forgiveness. And I also realized here that forgiveness comes at the end- that we can't forgive until the act has been completed and then there is this space in between. I think this is the space that God does the forgiven and invites us to work in tandem with him by loving in these seven ways.

What might be your job?

Would you allow the rest of the time be yours to work out some of your own thoughts and then write a prayer reflecting where you are?

Pass out paper, set chimes

q/a, sharing time permitting

closing prayer: I found this on fb- keeper of all things true and holy...

Where there is separation,
there is pain,
And where there is pain,
there is story.

And where there is story,
there is understanding,
and misunderstanding,
listening
and not listening.

May we-separated peoples, estranged strangers,
unfriended families, divided communities-
turn toward each other,
and turn toward our stories,
with understanding
and listening,
with argument and acceptance,
with challenge,
change, and consolation.

Because if God is to be found,
God will be found in the space between.

Amen