

Proper 19
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
September 14, 2014
The Rev. Shari Young, Preacher

(Preacher walks down center aisle to baptismal font at church entrance)

When we baptize babies, children or adults, we fill this font with water and the priest blesses the water to make it the holy water of new life in Christ. Our teaching is that in baptism, we pass from our old life of separation from God, our old life of sinfulness, into a new life in the presence of God, and surrounded by grace onto the end of our days. Baptism is our rite of initiation: it is how we become Christians.

During the ceremony the priest blesses the water and in that blessing she evokes, among other things, the image of the passage through the Red Sea by the Israelites, led by Moses. This is the story you heard today as our Old Testament lesson.

Like the Israelites being led through the Red Sea, we are led through the waters of baptism to new life. It may be a small act but the symbolism and the effect is huge.

“Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.” BCP

Forgiveness. We are forgiven. In baptism, God forgives us from top to bottom and just like the Israelites dancing with joy after the Red Sea passage so we celebrate.

Then we come back to our daily life, and our life is more like that of the unforgiving servant in the gospel. We experience enormous grace, 10,000 talents representing an impossibly large amount, an infinitude; and then we squabble with each other over the small stuff.

I heard someone say recently that marriage is a journey of continual forgivenessand the same is true of family life as well. We are constantly saying the wrong thing, forgetting things, being unkind or thoughtless.

We have annoying habits, and weaknesses, and inadequacies, that don't go away. The mechanism of being able to say “I'm sorry” and to be received with “I forgive you” is huge and important.

What is more difficult is being able to let it go.... at the heart of forgiveness is letting go.

When we fight, we dig up all those things we have buried and throw them.

We have many buried hurts with people long gone as well: Parents, relatives, friends.

And perhaps the worst, is the unforgiveness we have towards ourselves.

The pain over failures, mistakes, character flaws, weaknesses, hurt we have caused others.

What are we to do?

How can we truly forgive ourselves and others? Generally forgiveness is an act of will which is met, and fulfilled by grace.

Forgiveness is not a feeling although now and again we may have the gift of an amazing spiritual moments. *We want an emotional shift but we don't always get it.*

Every Sunday we confess our sins, and we can do so on a daily basis.

In the liturgy, and in daily prayer, there is a period of silence after the invitation: "Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor." We search our conscience, we will to let go, and we confess. We believe and trust that by grace God forgives us.

What about hurts we have suffered, not just the wrongs we have done? About people who have harmed us or those we love. How do we let go of those? How do we forgive? There is no quick and easy fix to our inability to truly let go of our feelings of being wronged or having done wrong.

I don't know about you but sometimes I obsess about someone who has wronged me, or some wrong I have done. I can't stop thinking about it.
I keep turning it over and over.

I have a couple of things I do in that case:

1. Talk: Have a conversation with someone else about it; a priest, a therapist, or your best friend are all good for this. You can even talk it over with yourself. I do this sometimes. I take both roles: I listen to myself as if I am a therapist and I give myself advice. Sometimes the advice is "Shari, get over it."

2. Release: Sometimes we just have to release the person or situation. "I release you" might need to be said quite a few times. "I forgive you, and I release you" until there is a healing of the memory.

3. Altar: Visualize putting that person or situation on the altar. This is a way of 'willing' to leave it with God. One person I spoke with dealt repeatedly with a dysfunctional family. I counseled "putting" that family in a box and leaving them on the altar. Again, this is may be something you have to repeat over and over.

4. Mantra: Try to catch your obsessive thought with a prayer or a mantra; The Jesus Prayer is an classic "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner." I also have my own from other sources" "Fill me with light that I might be a light to others."

We are loved, and we are forgiven, and our path is to lean more and more, through will and prayer and intention, into the freedom and openness of a God who surrounds us, and fill us in every moment with peace and love.