

“AN UNNATURAL ACT”

**Matthew 18:21-35
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

9/17/2017

INTRODUCTION:

It seems like such a simple question . . .

**. . . lord, there is this person who makes my life miserable.
gets on my very last nerve all the time!**

And they keep doing it.

over and over and over.

So, how many times do I have to forgive this clown, anyway?

**You would expect Jesus to say that if this person doesn't quit
whatever is irritating you**

sooner or later, you don't have to forgive him/her.

Doesn't Jesus understand the misery and anger a person can cause?

The damage to person and property that can be caused?

The answer is contained in the parable for today.

The answer is a huge number!

And it is meant to represent an unlimited number –

- For who among us would bother to keep count?

So Jesus uses a story to illustrate.

and I'm going to restate it in more modern terms.

Here is what god expects of those who call themselves Christians.

There is not a single one of us who deserves to be forgiven.

our sins have put us into debt so far with God

that we could never hope to ransom ourselves.

Not even if we offered everything we call our own.

As soon as the servant – the sinner – recognized his dilemma,

he begged forgiveness.

The king – God – being a righteous and loving king

saw the sincerity of the servant and forgave him.

That is our same fate – we owe a debt we cannot pay

because of the sin we have committed.

So, we rely on the promises of God to forgive us

if we repent and confess.

That's not the end of the story –

and it's not all that is required of us, either.

Immediately after being forgiven,

**the servant ran across someone who had sinned against him –
- scripture calls it a debt.**

**Instead of reflecting the mercy and grace
that was shown to the first servant,
he demands full restitution from the second servant.**

**When the king heard about this,
the king immediately rescinded the original forgiveness
and the servant was reduced to an unforgiven state
and cast into debtors prison.**

DEBTS AND DEBTORS:

Every worship service, we recite the Lord's prayer.

and in that prayer we say:

“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

Hmmmm.

Do you see a similarity between what we pray and this parable?

Of course you do.

But do you fully grasp what it means?

**Put the parable and the prayer into the same context
and you begin to see clearly
that if we do not forgive, we shall not be forgiven!**

Really?

Yes, really!

That seems harsh and unfair.

And the reason it seems harsh and unfair

is because of two things:

**first – we don't really comprehend and appreciate our
own forgiveness.**

**Second – there are people in our lives that are extremely
hard to forgive.**

Mother, father, step-parent, sister, brother,

Neighbor, friend who betrayed you,

The grouch you seem to keep running into

The person who blocks all progress in the church.

The nay-sayer who just ruins your day by existing!

The thief, the cheat, the liar, the gossip . . .

. . . that list seems to be endless.

**How in the world are we expected to forgive that person
before they have made restitution
or have asked for forgiveness?**

**It is as natural as breathing to want to get even –
to make someone suffer as they have made us suffer.**

**We have been hurt
and we want to inflict the same amount of pain
so the person knows what it feels like!**

**What is not natural
is to walk away from all that pain and hurt
without expecting satisfaction;
without our “pound of flesh”.**

**A wise teacher once asked each of her students
to bring a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes to school.
For every person they had not fully forgiven
they chose a potato, wrote on it the person’s name
and put it in the plastic bag.**

**Even though some of their bags were quite heavy,
the students were told to carry this bag with them everywhere
for one week,**

**putting it beside their bed at night,
on the car seat when driving,
and next to their desk at school.**

**The first lesson the students learned
was the hassle of lugging this bag around with them
made it clear what a spiritual weight they were carrying
and how they had to pay attention to it all the time.**

**To make matters worse,
the potatoes soon deteriorated to a nasty smelly slime.**

**This is a great metaphor
for the price we pay for keeping our pain and anger
by not forgiven others!**

**Can you see how destructive it is not to forgive?
How much more would we be at peace –
- with ourselves and others – if we would just forgive.**

**I know that this business of forgiveness is not natural
and it is sometimes very difficult to do.
I have my own bag of potatoes I'm carrying around.**

**For the answer to how do we get rid of these potatoes ,
how do we forgive those folks who have really wronged us
I'm going to borrow a page
Right out of Coach Lou Holtz's playbook.**

**He tells the story of a dream he had one night
While coaching the football team at Minnesota.**

**It was his fondest desire to take his team to the Rose Bowl.
In this dream, he was invited to a selection process
to determine which team would get a Rose Bowl invite.**

**In this dream, all the coaches in the NCAA were invited.
They were all seated around a swimming pool.
The host of the gathering released a fish into the pool.**

**It was then announced that whoever managed to catch the fish
Would win a spot in the Rose Bowl.**

**Iowa was the best team that year and had first chance –
the coach approached the pool with a fishing rod
and had no luck.**

The next in line was Michigan.

The coach approached the pool with a rifle – without success.

On and on it went –

Coach after coach – method after method.

And the fish kept alluding them.

Finally, it was Lou Holz's turn.

As he approached the pool,

he paused and picked up a teaspoon.

When asked what he was doing with the spoon,

he replied: "I'm going to the Rose Bowl"

and began dipping the pool – one spoonful at a time.

And that's how you begin forgiving!

One act – one person – at a time.

SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

You see, we should be so thankful for our personal forgiveness

that we are willing to share that sense of relief with others –

- those who – like us – do not deserve to be forgiven.

Jesus made it very clear –

- if we expect to be forgiven, we must be forgiving.

Very few of us will ever be hounded and persecuted for our beliefs

to the extent that Jesus was.

And yet, from the cross, He was able to say:

“Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do.”

**So forgiving others – moving beyond our pain and anger –
is neither easy nor is it natural.**

But it is required.

**So when we get stuck – unforgiving and carrying a sack of potatoes
and being human means we will get stuck**

**when old wounds and smoldering anger raise their ugly heads
and try to claim your attention and energy –**

follow Lou Holz’s advice – one spoonful at a time.

PRAYER:

**Heavenly Father, You have set before us a very difficult task –
that of forgiving folks who may not deserve to be forgiven. Remind
us that when we stand before You and ask for forgiveness, we do not
deserve to be forgiven – yet You offer it to us just for the asking.**

**Give us the strength, courage and wisdom to rid ourselves of
guilt, anger, emotional pain by releasing others from our debt
through forgiveness. And let us know the true peace You promise.**