



**Rev Helen Jacobi**

**Forgiveness**

Year C Ordinary Sunday 7

Genesis 45:3-15

Luke 6:27-38

20 February 2022

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Forgive and you will be forgiven.”

I said last week’s reading should have come with a health warning. Today’s come with a “high level of complexity and difficulty” label. The text picks up where last week’s left off. If you remember Jesus is talking to his disciples having come down from the mountain. He has just chosen the 12 who are to be his close followers and leaders of the others. And he is teaching them. He has said that people will hate them, revile and defame them for being his followers.

Then he says “I say to you that listen”, or one writer says it should translate “I say to you that are still listening”<sup>1</sup> (some humor maybe, or some reality that a lot of the followers might have slipped away by now). I say to you that are still listening .. love your enemies ... do not condemn .... forgive.”

Really?

Let’s start with what this passage is NOT about.

It is not about forgetting.

It is not about putting up with violence or abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/seventh-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-627-38-](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/seventh-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-627-38-2)

It is not about minimizing harm.

We say – forgive and forget – that is such a mistake – sure forgive and forget small things – words which have not been intended but which have hurt, things you have forgotten to do – but we cannot and should not forget injustice and acts of violence, robbery, war, rape, abuse. Such things cannot be forgotten and if we do try to forget them then we only repress memories and emotions and pain which if repressed will do us more harm individually and collectively.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean denying that wrong was done, nor does it mean not being angry about something. We can be frightened of anger, but Jesus got angry – think of Jesus in the Temple throwing out the moneylenders, or reciting the woes last week – woe to you who are rich. Anger is energy which can change people, can bring about justice where before there was injustice. If Maori were not angry at land confiscations from the 1800s and if Pakeha were not angry about it too, then the land would never be returned or compensated for. And forgiveness does not mean being a doormat or putting up with wrongdoing.

The phrase – turn the other cheek from today’s gospel has been interpreted as put up with it. Women in abusive relationships have been told to stay and submit. But this is not Jesus’ intention – to slap someone on the cheek was to formally insult them (not beat them up) and turning the other cheek is to walk away and not seek revenge for the insult.

Forgiveness involves facing pain and anger and the wrongs done; and eventually letting go. Forgiveness can be helped by the repentance of the wrongdoer but often that repentance never comes. Forgiveness is not dependent on repentance, forgiveness is about working on your own feelings and emotions.

Forgiveness is a way of life. A craft to be learned<sup>2</sup>. Each time you succeed in forgiving someone the next time you have the experience to build on. And in a community of Christians we can learn from each other, build on the experience of our sisters and brothers in Christ. Some of you are better at it than others, and we can learn from you.

And we gather together on a Sunday to be present together with the source of all forgiveness, with the God who forgives. We can hope to learn the craft of forgiveness only because God forgives us first and offers us unconditional love.

In our liturgy we hear words of forgiveness offered but do we hear them and really believe them? They are not just words but action, which is real and which touches our lives.

On Ash Wednesday we take some time to think more deeply about the wrongs of our world and our own actions which make up those wrongs. The sign of the ashes is the reminder of our humility and our own forgiveness. The sign of the cross on our foreheads traces the sign made at our baptism which marked us as Christ's own forever. The ashes also remind us of our mortality and our dependence on God.

Seeking a spirit of forgiveness, an ability to let go of things that have power over us, can also bring us around to a more positive frame of mind. To see the glass half full and not half empty; to believe that change for good is possible.

The wonderful image this passage finishes with "you will be given a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over into your lap" – we are not sure what this is supposed to be – grain maybe, or flour.

Whatever it is it represents the abundant love of God – if we live into that abundance and don't see God's love as something rare,

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<sup>2</sup> L. Gregory Jones Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis p xii.

only occasionally doled out in little bits – we will find this impossible list of forgiveness and loving our enemies might just be possible.

There is a lot of tension in our world right now; plenty of anxiety about covid; and it's all bubbling over at some of the protests and other places.

As people of faith we can dig into our faith, find the wisdom, take a breath, pray for discernment before leaping to conclusions.

Writer and change maker Jess Berentson-Shaw wrote this week on Newsroom<sup>3</sup> an article titled “Why we need stories of strength and not division”.

Writing with the protests in the background she urged journalists and commentators to look for stories of strength and focus on solutions rather than endless stories about the protests that make us see more division than there really is, and risks magnifying the crazy conspiracy theories that people are suffering from. Jess Berentson-Shaw said:

*Not leading with problems and deficits is a moral imperative, when we are looking for solutions that will make the biggest difference in this pandemic.*

That is what Jesus is getting at with his seemingly impossible list of commandments – If the disciples are going to bring about the “kingdom of God” they need a new way of being, new rules, new aspirations.

And they can do it if they rely on each other, on Jesus, and live out of abundance and not scarcity.

God's love is always overflowing; we are the ones who want to scoop just a little bit out of the container.

So in the midst of all our anxieties, worries and frustration allow the love of God to be abundant, and then see how we get on with forgiveness.

It will come more easily, I promise.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/why-we-need-stories-of-strength-not-division>