

NAURC worship 13.09.20 Readings and reflections

Reading: Genesis 50:15-21 (NIV)

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Introduction

When I was young there was a program on TV called "Get your own back". You had to compete against your parents to get more points. If you got the most points at the end of the episode you got to get your own back on your parents by dropping them in a pool of Gunge. The revenge was all for pretty trivial things like making you do the washing up, or giving you egg sandwiches in your packed lunch. I wonder how many of us can think of someone you might like to drop into a pool of gunge for doing something we weren't too happy with.

Joseph was presented with an opportunity for revenge. He could have, now that his father had died, rejected his brothers and given them a taste of the life he had lived by throwing them in prison. But Joseph had forgiven his brothers long ago.

Joseph trusted in God when things weren't going the way he thought they should. God had told him his purpose and he trusted God through the hard times. Even when it seemed that his brothers who were not following God seemed to be doing much better in life, for a start they weren't in prison, he continued to trust in God.

When we become Christians, we are not promised a life free from trials. There are many different things we all have to face, sickness, loss of loved ones, financial hardships, rejection, loneliness and isolation. These are all things that affect everyone Christian and non-Christian.

The difference we have, when we have God as a friend, is trusting that he can use the suffering we go through for good. It might not be something you want to hear while you're going through it. When life is going well it's easy to see God's hand in

the blessing but when life is tough it's hard to see God's hand moving. When Joseph was sent to prison, he must have felt miles away from where he thought God was sending him, but he trusted God was still sending him in the right direction.

Joseph says in verse 20: **"You intended to harm me but God intended it for good"**. Joseph was able to forgive his brothers as he saw it all led to him fulfilling God's plan for his life.

Reading Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Reflection

Matthew 18 starts with the disciples arguing about who would be the greatest. Jesus tells them that we should be childlike, meaning we should be humble and have sincere hearts. Not be childish and argue over petty things.

He goes on to tell the parable of the lost sheep, where the 99 are left behind to hunt down the one who is lost. Teaching us not to look down on others.

He then talks about how we should treat believers who sin against us. Firstly, talking to them about it. Then if it's still a problem talking to them with others present and then if it's still a problem getting leaders from church involved. He is saying we should do all we can to reconcile with them. Jesus is talking about forgiveness and reconciliation in the church, so we are talking about forgiving our fellow believers here.

Straight after this Peter asks the question, how many times must I forgive my brother? It's as if he has a realisation while Jesus is speaking about forgiveness. He gives an answer to his own question. Seven. Peter was being generous here as most Rabbis at the time would say three times is enough is enough times to forgive. Even in Jesus' example, he uses 3 stages. So with Peters $3 \times 2 + 1$ for luck, he thought he was being generous.

When I was reading up on these verses, I came across some interesting number symbolism. As we know 7 is seen as perfection. When Peter proposed 7-was he was probably thinking about this? Peter suggesting 7 times, would also have put everyone in mind of the sabbath. This being the seventh day when God rested from creating the world. Was this a way of Peter saying "should I only forgive people on the sabbath?" There was some very complicated number work and explanations but it came down to the fact that if Peter had meant 'should I forgive only on the sabbath', Jesus answering no, 70×7 was the equivalent of him saying no, 24, 7 which I think fits with what Jesus is trying to portray.

Maths was never one of my stronger subjects at school. I remember in an A level physics class we had to do some complicated calculations to work out the colour of the sun. We set about our equations and announced to the teacher very proudly that the sun was blue. It wasn't until the he told us to look out the window that we realised we had made a mistake. Jesus isn't giving us a maths test when he says 70×7 , He doesn't mean 490 times but more, don't keep a record of forgiveness. If were logging the number of times we have forgiven somebody is it truly forgiveness?

Do you remember pic and mix? Not something particularly Covid safe but hopefully it will come back one day. I think everyone my age remembers the pic and mix at Woolworths. I remember it being massive, but I was probably just quite small. We didn't have it very often, but it was a treat. It was the kind where you have to take your bag of carefully chosen sweets to the till to get weighed and hope you have enough money to pay for it otherwise you have to put something back. Now there's an art to pick and mix, if you were clever you would get lots of light sweets like marshmallows or flying saucers. Unfortunately for me I like fudge and jelly beans and smarties so I always end up with pretty much one of each. Now, there is

another type of pic n mix, you choose a pot and fill it with whatever sweets you want. There is no need to worry about what sweets you put in, you can go crazy and stuff as many sweets in as you can and as long as you can fit the lid on there's no way you will have to put any back. I think this is the attitude Jesus wants us to have with forgiveness. Don't count every time we forgive and take it back if it costs too much but forgive without counting, this is what God does for us. Jesus has paid the price and God's forgiveness overflows.

I think Jesus is trying to get across that it's all about our hearts' attitude. The verses preceding today's passage have the same message. Don't worry about who the greatest is – make sure you are humble and welcoming.

It doesn't matter how many people are safe, if there is even one person lost they need to be rescued.

Don't just forgive once, forgive as many times as you need to.

And in the rest of the Bible...

Don't just give what you have too, give all you have

Don't just love your neighbour, love your enemies and pray for them.

If someone asks for your shirt, give them your coat too

Its less about concentrating on the rules, but more understanding God's heart.

The Parable Jesus goes on to tell is pretty straightforward. God is like the king who forgives his servant a great debt. The debt is great, one writer comments it is described like us using the phrase 'a zillion pounds'. The debt is our sin, too great to measure. The servant is repentant and pleads forgiveness and a chance to pay back what is owed, knowing he could never repay the debt. And the King forgives him. The forgiven servant goes about his day, when he sees another servant who owed him money. He holds him by the throat and demands what he is owed, not enough that he would have the money to hand but enough that given the chance he could pay it back in time. He is repentant and pleads forgiveness. But the forgiven servant cannot forgive and has the second servant thrown into jail. The king finds out and punishes the forgiven servant as he has not passed on the forgiveness the king has shown.

God has forgiven us our great debt. He has shown us how it is to be done and wants us to pass it on to our brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a significant point in the parable that it is important to talk about. Both the servants, the forgiven and the servant who was not forgiven were repentant and pleaded for forgiveness. We need to be repentant. We can't just go around doing as we please and continue sin, as shown by the way the forgiven servant is eventually treated.

We are also then not expected to forgive if someone is unrepentant. I was confused when I read the verses preceding this parable, as it seems that Jesus is saying that we should forgive up to three times and then give up on them, but in looking more at this parable it seems that if someone is unrepentant we cannot fully forgive them. It is still important that we are ready to forgive if they become repentant, and we need to let go of the hurt that they have caused. When we forgive, we don't say what you've done is ok, but we accept their repentance.

The reading we heard first today about Joseph shows us what is possible when we forgive. Had Joseph not forgiven his brothers for what they did to him they would not have settled in the land of Egypt and grown their families to the point where we pick the story up with Moses leading them out of Egypt and Joshua leading them into the promised land.

When we don't forgive someone we tend to carry it around with us and it stops us moving into what God wants for us. It gets heavier and more uncomfortable the more we hold onto it. Sometimes we carry it around for so long we have gotten used to it being there and don't notice anymore. Or you may be holding onto something that you believe is unforgiveable. It feels like its weighing you down.

You may have noticed if you are in the building or watching online that I have been wearing my backpack through the whole service. Some of you may not even have noticed it. It's not a fashion statement but more of an illustration. I'd like to think I've led this service adequately – it's my first time, I won't have got everything right. But when we have unforgiveness it's like a weight on our shoulders. We might have gotten good at carrying it around and living life with it. When we repent and ask God for forgiveness, he can take it away. When we forgive others as God has forgiven us we can take off the burden and feel the weight lifted. It's only when we let go that we feel the release and realise what we have been carrying around.

As we listen to the next hymn reflect on anything you want to give to God. Whether that be something you need to forgive or be forgiven for, or if you need to trust God in life's trials.