

Discipleship Moment

Text: John 21:15-25

Humans are not good at forgiving. For some of you, that may seem basic: for others, it may seem pessimistic. But no matter how you look at it, it's true. Even religious people, people committed to higher thinking and higher philosophy, are not very good at forgiving. Even Christians whose central belief is God's gracious, unearned forgiveness and love, have a hard time forgiving others.

It doesn't make sense to forgive. When someone does something wrong to us, there is either an unspoken or spoken debt. If someone wrongs me by cutting me off in traffic or lying to me, I feel like they owe me. And sometimes, if we know the person, they feel the same way. When someone wrongs me, I have some power over them. They owe me. Either by doing something good for me or by my doing something wrong to them, to get back.

But in Jesus we see another way. Jesus openly, regularly, and often forgave. He forgave the woman who was about to be stoned, he forgave the cripple who was lowered from the roof, he forgave those who crucified him (while he was being crucified), and he forgave Peter for denying Jesus. Jesus willingly gave away any debt that Peter owed him. Peter knew he did wrong; he was eager to see Jesus again and make it right (he jumped out of the boat and swam to Jesus as soon as he realized Jesus was on the shore). Jesus could have leveraged the debt that Peter owed him, he could have made Peter swear allegiance to him, or promise to never sin again, Jesus could have given Peter any task, and Peter would have done it. But Jesus didn't. Jesus, instead, forgave Peter. Jesus knew Peter loved him, and welcomed Peter into his life and ministry, "Feed my sheep."

If I were starting a religion, forgiveness would not be one of my tenants. If you forgive others, you lose most of your power over them. If I wanted to control behavior and gain power, I would not forgive sins. Or I would only forgive sins if I could get money, goods, or favors for my forgiveness. In fact, there are some religions that use this tactic.

But Jesus doesn't do that (sometimes those who use his name do, but Jesus never did). And in the whole Bible, we see a God who is quick to forgive, who wants to reconcile his children back to right relationship with him. This is beyond comprehension. This is not how humans would construct a religion. This is not how humans would try to gain power. The only explanation is that this witness came from outside us. This Jesus defies our expectation and our assumptions. And we are forced to recognize that the only explanation is that Jesus was who he said he was, and his Father is who he says he is.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. Has anyone ever wronged you? What did that feel like?
2. Think of a time when someone wronged you, did you forgive them? Why or why not? Was it easy or hard? How did you feel about forgiving them?
3. When someone wronged you, did they feel guilt? Have you ever felt guilty for something you did? Why do you think we feel guilt? What do you want to do when you feel guilty?
4. Have you ever been forgiven? What was that like? Have you ever forgiven someone, what was that like?
5. What happens when we forgive one another? What happens to our relationships? Our friendships?
6. What would it be like if the church was known for being radically forgiving? What would that do to our church? To our community?