

Forgiveness Revisited ~ December 6, 2009

Luke 3:1-6

Through the years, many people have told me that they “have trouble with forgiveness.” Others have told me that if we choose to forgive someone it is a sign of weakness. You will have to forgive me, if I tell you I simply do not understand how withholding forgiveness for another person, or ourselves, makes our lives fuller and more complete. The only one we hurt by refusing to forgive is ourself—especially, when we replay old grievances over and over again in our minds. It seems as if feeling wronged makes us think we are right about something or other. Life is far too short to take so seriously, that we cripple ourselves by being unable to let go of past hurts and move forward.

Jesus told us that we are not to forgive a person only once but many, many times. He knew that precious time was lost in life if we carry stupid grudges that accomplish nothing for anyone.

Carolyn Myss (Mace) in her book, Anatomy of the Spirit, reminds us that forgiveness is not just saying to another, “everything’s okay.” Instead it needs to be a change within us that helps us let go of a need for vengeance and the feeling that we are the victim. We need to stop playing the “blame game” and stop living the past over and over again. She writes, “Think love. Live in appreciation and gratitude...remind yourself continually of the message of all spiritual masters worth their salt: keep your spirit in the present time. in the language of Jesus, ‘Leave the dead and get on with your life.’ And as Buddha taught, “There is only now. By far the strongest possible poison to the human spirit is the inability to forgive oneself or another person.”

She is right. We become closed in people, unable to trust others when we lose the ability to forgive. Our outlook becomes “pinched,” for lack of a better word, and we refuse to see all in life that is good and fine and beautiful. We go into a protective mode to assure ourselves that we will never be injured again. In doing so we cut ourselves off from feeling anything. We lose the ability to sustain relationships, we gaze at others with suspicion and refuse to let them come close to us. Our religion is one of relationships. To have the abundance of life Jesus offered us, is to be in right relationship with God and our fellow humans.

Myss (Mace) writes: “Healing is possible through acts of forgiveness. In the life and teachings of Jesus, forgiveness is a spiritual act ..., but it is also a physical healing act. Forgiveness is no longer an option but a necessity for healing. Jesus always first healed his patients’ emotional suffering; the physical healing then followed naturally.... forgiveness is an essential spiritual act that must occur in order to open oneself fully to the healing power of love. Self-love means caring for ourselves enough to forgive people in our past so that the wounds can no longer damage us—for our wounds do not hurt the people who hurt us, they hurt only us. Releasing our attachment to these wounds enables us to move from a childlike relationship with God into one in which we participate with God in acting out of love and compassion.”

I agree with her—to grow and help bring about the realm of God in the world we need to be in partnership with God. This partnership is grown through our understanding of

God's nature as revealed to us in and through Jesus. God's nature is one of love and compassion, of forgiveness and forbearance of one another.

Our scripture for this morning tells us that John came, a voice crying in the wilderness, urging people to prepare the way of God. To smooth off all the rough edges—our rough edges, to make life a level playing field, to know that we are forgiven by the One who loves and sustains us. Because we have been forgiven by God, it is up to us to extend the same gift to those with whom we live and move and have our being.

As we move through Advent we have the perfect time to reflect on our lives and on all the times we have not forgiven an injury. Then we need to go about doing it. We need to release others and ourselves from judgment and start anew.

Our sacrament is all about new beginnings—it is all about second and more chances to move forward in the manner of Christ with our focus on a bright and better future for all of us. There is always another chance for us with God—always. The choice to decide to do a new thing is always ours—we must choose wisely.

-- Amen