

Sunday, September 17, 2023 *“Forgiven by Christ”*

***Romans 14: 1-12 Matthew 18: 21-35***

Last week we learned of the 3 C’s for Glenwood Church for this year: Community of Christ Connected in Faith. Just what has this come to mean to us in this last week as we worship and share in the work and service of Christ in this place? I have receive some comments about this statement because people have been saying isn’t this what we are supposed to be doing? Or I am glad that this is what we need to focus upon. Sometimes we lose our focus in the doing!

Sometimes we also look to what was done in years ago to reach out to people to tell them Jesus’ story of love and his teachings of how one serves faithfully. Yes we remember the busy bustling days of the 1970’s but we cannot dwell on that. We need to realize that we are a community of faith in the post pandemic post Christian era of 2023. The church is not even as it was 10-15 or especially 3 years ago. But who we are is still important in God’s eyes because we are the Body of Christ faithful to the call of Jesus now and committed to telling his story of love. We are also committed to teaching, learning and growing together through the stories of Jesus’ life and in what he said which changed people’s lives then and still does now. We are able to worship God as a community of faith focused on Jesus Christ and we experience the guidance of the Spirit in our midst.

And one of those teachings deemed foundational to our faith growth in Jesus is forgiveness. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he urges the young church to be welcoming those who are weak or less experienced in their faith not to quarrel with them over opinions but to look at how one is serving each other. It is not good to judge others but to do what you are called to do in honour of God.

There is a story of a church which had two opposing ideas of the kinds of dinnerware— yes dishes to purchase new and which of the old and chipped needed to be recycled or discarded. The argument between the two groups was what was to be kept and what was to go. This argument grew stronger until it occurred to one person to see if the current dishes in use could be washed safely in the new dishwasher that the church had worked so diligently to obtain. Not only did the old chipped ones crack further but those which were ok, didn’t not fit

properly and cracked too. The result—the need for the new dishwasher to wash new dishes only was made. And this church’s opposing views on this matter ended. But at what cost? Or should we ask how did this situation help this church? In the end, the need to be able to use what they had worked hard for was necessary. And so every time one of the new dishes was washed in the dishwasher the story in some version was shared in how it almost divided the church.

As we consider what is important in our community of faith and why we commit ourselves to the church we might remember Paul’s words. “We do not live to ourselves and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord’s. For to this end- Jesus died and lived again so that he is the Lord of both the dead and the living.” We do not live to ourselves. So why do we judge others? Because it is in our nature to do so. But as we read further, each of us is also accountable for ourselves before God. “As I live, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” This is why we are called to serve—not ourselves, but the Lord God.

Yet there are circumstances when we might wonder about what we are supposed to do in those moments when hurt, loss and deception run rampant. There are also moments when what is sought is revenge and forgiveness is not even appearing as an option.

There is a story of a man named Joe who decided to take an afternoon walk through the foothills just above a lake where he had been fishing. Joe was comfortably dressed in shorts, a T-shirt, and tennis shoes. As he stepped over a small log, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his leg. as he stepped over a small log. He then noticed a large diamondback rattler slithering into the undergrowth beside the log. He looked down at his leg, saw that he was bleeding from two small puncture wounds in his right calf and knew that the snake’s venom had entered his body. “I must get to a hospital,” he told himself. “But first, I’ll find that snake and kill it!”

As he searched for the rattlesnake that bit him, he spent precious time looking under logs, near rocks and by trees to find it. Meanwhile the venom quickly coursed through his body and with the exertion of his searching activity, he is left dizzy and weak. He turned to go back to

his car but only after a few steps, he collapsed on the path and lay there as the venom traveled to his heart, and this ended his life.

Hours later the sheriff found Joe's body and called the paramedics and investigating the scene they realized that he had died of a snakebite. But they couldn't understand the reason because he was very close to his car and just 20 minutes from the hospital. Joe could have survived his encounter with a rattlesnake but in his anger, he wanted revenge on the rattlesnake more than he cared about why. He had found himself in the dilemma—of I DON'T GET MAD, I GET EVEN. The better option for Joe was to see that he had been bitten, leave the snake and go to the hospital. Would he really forgive the snake for being what it is? No one will ever know, but the better option which would have sustained his life was to forgive.

Jesus believed it important that his disciples practice forgiveness in all their relationships. Peter went up to him and asked, I another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? 7 times? No, not 7, but 70 times 7. Why so many? Because when we forgive, it is in our best interest to do so. Forgiveness leads to true happiness and makes it possible for relationships to be maintained. Forgiveness is also a part of our commitment to Christ. For he forgives us if we forgive others and if we do we may experience God's kingdom of love.

This is what Jesus was telling his listeners about the kingdom of heaven. He says the kingdom may be compared to a king who settles his accounts with the slaves. Now kings and slaves really do not have accounts- the king rules and the slaves follow them. This king began the reckoning with the slaves to see where the finances of each were and what was owed. The first slave owed 10, 000 talents. He could not pay and so he was to be sold with his wife, children and possessions in order that the king gain money and know his wealth. But the slave fell before the king and asked for patience in order to pay what was owed. Taking pity on the man, the king released him and forgave what was owed. His debt was paid

The slave was free of debt and was able to live freely. But upon leaving the king, he saw another slave who owed him money and demanded repayment. The second slave fell down and pleaded with the first slave; I will repay you. But the first slave did not want to accept this, so

he went and threw him into jail in order that his debt be paid. The other slaves saw what had happened and reported this to the king.

The king summoned the first slave who had been forgiven of all debt and set free by the king. His debt was forgiven because he pleaded with him. Yet when a fellow servant did the same, there was no forgiveness but only revenge in order to get what he needed. The king was angry and turned this first slave to be punished until all the debt was paid.

But what does this mean for us as people in a community of faith, as followers of Jesus and as people living out Christ's teachings? We are called to forgive—big debts, little debts, hurts, pains, problems and encounters which call us to see who we are. We are to forgive because as Jesus says the transformation of all involved is worth it. Think about all those difficult moments- people you dread talking with because of a previous problem, or when you got frustrated, fed up, annoyed by others, and yet when you heard their story- you were changed. But the stories need to be true and factual.

Of course we are not to remain or return to situations or circumstance that are harmful to them or to forgive abusers quickly, but what Jesus is calling us to do is confront the things in life that we hold on to out of spite, or pride, for our own selfish interests. It is about the feuds spanning generations that no one knows what happened years before. It is about being short-tempered with people who have done nothing to provoke it. It is about how we hold on to hurts and angry feelings that harm ourselves. It is about transformation- the changes that occur because one hand is extended and one heart is opened up. It involves an intentional decision to let go of resentment and anger. The act that hurt or offended you might always be with you.

Jesus says forgive. All we need to do is tell Him what we have done. For if one repents their sins, the same is forgiven, and God remembers them no more.

As a community of faith focused on Christ we connect with one another because of our need to forgive our wrongdoings. It is Jesus who through his act of love on the cross, that we are given the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. This is what we are called to do as a community of Christ connected in faith. Thanks be to God.

**PRAYER:**

God we praise you that we may come to you, repent and be forgiven because of your love for us. We praise you that we are called to serve you in faith forgiving one another as Christ taught.

Hear our prayers O God as we share our thoughts with you. Forgive us we pray. Amen.