

**Knuckles, Yolkes, and Stingers**  
**Forgiveness, Part 2**  
**Pastor Laura Hehner**

So last week we opened into this sermon series about forgiveness.

We talked about how often the need for it comes up in our daily lives.

In even the most minor of moments---barely even noticeable!

Standing at the stove, as your partner says just the wrong thing

about what you're working so hard to make for dinner...

.... driving through a parking lot the wrong way,

just as someone comes down the right direction,

Moving through traffic on the road, when you or the other accidentally cuts the other off,

talking on the phone with telemarketers (enough said!),

having to wait on hold too long with customer service

while trying to sort out someone else's mistake....

We're constantly confronted with the need to forgive or be forgiven,

because we do stuff all the time that's either inconvenient for each other,

or offensive to each other, or hurtful to one another.

Most times, without intention.... Accidentally.

Last week, we opened our minds and hearts

to our experience of forgiveness with a spiritual task:

To try our best to pay closer attention to these moments.

To these minutes in which this always-present need

to forgive or be forgiven popped up in our *own* lives.

To notice how often a situation calls from inside of our soul our willingness to forgive,

Not only through these smaller incidents, but through the bigger ones,

that happen between us, too,

Times of difficulty between us and a friend or loved one,

asking more from us than a gentle wave or nod,

to let them know things will be okay between you.

And I really do hope you were able to make some time to do this---

---letting yourself really focus on the spiritual practice---

Because if you did, I'm sure each of you found it happened a *lot*. Right?

---far more often than we causally notice when our spirits aren't so sharp or attentive.

And I'm sure you noticed on top of this, that even in the most casual of circumstances...

... like moving down the wrong side of the parking lot...

... it's a heck of a lot harder to give and receive that forgiveness

than we'd like to imagine.

Forgiveness doesn't happen too easily between us.

Too often, *bitterness* overtakes our eyes and voices, in that split-second we have to react.

*Anger* clouds our judgment, as we focus too much on who was right or wrong,

instead of the much larger importance of who we are to each other.

...So many times, these moments tend to *sting* rather than soothe.

Because the plain truth is, it's *hard* to forgive.

And though I'm a pastor, I'm definitely no pro, myself.

As we sat with each other last week, we talked about this truth

Being one of the reasons Jesus focused so powerfully

on the idea in his ministry while he was here...

... the word, in different forms,

brought up a total of 98 times in the New King James translation.

Next week, we'll meditate awhile on what happens, when we ask *God* for forgiveness.

But this morning, in this second part of our sermon series,

we're going to settle our minds into the question of

What happens, when *we* forgive *others*.

Now, of course, both of these questions are deeply metaphysical,

and you can go into all sorts of amazing thoughts and personal interpretations

about the spiritual realities exchanged between us in these times, for a *long* while,

---with infinite possibilities.

The questions can bloom into some profoundly interesting words

to share on a nice night over a bottle of wine, with a friend.

...But today, in this church, and this sanctuary,

we're going to stick real close to the biblical text.

Because in just a few simple words---easy statements---

---Jesus sums it up for us, pretty clearly.

What happens when we forgive others?

In the first part of our scripture from the gospel of Luke,  
we find the disciples asking Jesus about how to pray,  
And he responds with what we know as the Lord's Prayer.

...And I believe at least *one* answer to this question is found right there.

In one simple, but very complicated statement.

We repeat these words every week while we're together,  
and maybe even sometimes while we're alone.

... and I think in that, we sometimes lose touch with the deeper meaning of each line.

But shoo.... I'll tell ya, there's one part of that prayer  
that's real hard for me to say---*every* time...

One line where the meaning is just too deep not to sink into as they're spoken.

Let's say it together, real quick. And I'll stop at the part I'm talking about...

We're not praying right now, just speaking, so you don't need to bow you're head, but  
feel free.

Ok... ready?

Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be  
done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and FORGIVE US  
OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

Ok—stop.

It's right there.

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

[express tension] Ahck! Those are some scary words, aren't they??

Just think about them for a second.

We speak them so casually, but each time we say them, what are we doing?

We are saying to God, that we would like to be forgiven *by* God,

The way we, ourselves, forgive other people.

And it's not that safer Christian "We," as a whole, we're talking about when we say it...

.. we're each lifting this up God, ourselves. Me. You.

And that's a real risky request to raise up to Life, isn't it?

Something not to be said lightly if we hope to *mean* what we pray---

---Thinking back on that last person who cut you off on the road.

Thinking back on that last customer service rep

who just wouldn't listen and didn't seem to know what they were doing...

... And far worse, thinking back on that one person we can *each* recall in our own lives,

who's done enough wrong by us that even the thought of their *face*

makes our hair thin just a little more.

REALLY? *That's* what we're asking?

For God to show us the same level of mercy *we* give to others as we walk around each day?

*Every* time I pray the words my mind silently pleads with God ...

Ah Jesus---WHY?? Why did he ask us to do this? To say this?

...And after enough of this pleading, God finally had mercy on *me*,  
and started to help me understand...

And yes, it is all about this *mercy*---this forgiveness---between us.  
See, Jesus---that mind-blowing, absolutely perfect teacher he was---  
---was being tricky with us, here.

(As *usual*, right?... there are layers upon layers of truth in his words.  
He wasn't a superficial guy.)

He wasn't just talking about God's mercy toward *us*, here.

... At the same time as he spoke this simple line,

He was answering that QUESTION: what *happens*, when *we* forgive *others*.

There's a common thread tying all of his teachings together...

... To love our neighbor AS ourselves. That we are all ONE in Christ. ONE in God.

The idea isn't exclusive to Hinduism or John Lennon.

It's one of the core teachings of Christ.

One, that as Christians, we *must* try to better realize, if we hope to understand the rest.

We are all ONE in God's spirit.

And when Jesus asked us to pray these words,

it wasn't to make us feel guilty or ashamed,

Or to place some kind of sense of *bartering* between us and God.

The larger truth he was telling us, in this small part of this short prayer,

Is that, *because* we are *one*, the treatment we give others,

IS the treatment we give ourselves.

That when we look into the eyes of another,  
we're looking into a mirror *reflection* of our own self...

...Focusing merely, with each glance of our eyes, on different *parts* of the same Life.

To imagine otherwise would be to stare into that reflection at your eyes, then your nose,  
and think of them as somehow separate from your face.

And if any word of what I just said sounds outlandish to you  
please refer back to 1 Corinthians Ch 12:12-26.

We are all smaller fragments of the larger Spirit of God.

...Each of our lives, different thoughts in the larger consciousness of the All.

Of the beautiful and holy soul of God.

...So what we do to each other, we *always* do to ourselves.

And when we forgive others for their trespasses against us,  
what we are doing, is forgiving *ourselves*.

In this practice of forgiving, Jesus asks us to see in each person who does us wrong---  
---is a glimpse of ourselves.

And whether we're being bumped in the shoulder while standing in a long line,

Or cut off in our traffic lane, or spoken to roughly for no reason...

... we're asked to see past that perceived separation between us---

---To look past the obvious, and see a little deeper---

And show mercy and acceptance when those parts don't work perfectly together.  
To hold back from beating our foot with a hammer, when we trip over ourselves,  
And to instead do our best to regain our balance, and keep walking.  
To continue moving forward the best we can.

As mindblowing as these things Jesus taught us might be,  
this stuff is a lot easier to understand than to do.  
Takes a lot of practice. A lot of patience.  
Because after all, it's hard to forgive ourselves,  
in our own minds when we screw up, isn't it?  
So of course it's just as hard to forgive ourselves,  
when looking into the eyes of that person staring back at us...  
...When looking into that other piece of who we are.

None of us are perfect at doing this,  
Because though we're all tinier parts of the soul of God, we are not all-knowing.  
We are not God Itself.  
And only the Holy All is capable of giving the purest and deepest love,  
past what we can ever imagine or even hope for.

And we'll meditate on that breathtaking love,  
and forgiveness and mercy of God, next Sunday.

...But for now, let's do our best—whatever we can, whenever we can, day by day---  
---to love ourselves. To care for ourselves. To understand *ourselves*...

In loving, and caring, and understanding who we see,  
each time we look into the face of that person staring back into our own.

Amen.