

A Lenten Conversation: Repentance, Forgiveness and Restoration

It is a word that is very common within the Church—*forgiveness*. As well it should be...for it is the heart of the Gospel. **The forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ alone.** But the concept and practice of forgiveness is widely misunderstood and misapplied. Why? Because we are sinners! So, we need the forgiveness of Jesus to even engage in the forgiveness of Jesus. But forgiveness starts with repentance. For there are two components or postures to forgiveness—a **sorrow for sin** (repentance) and **a willingness to forgive and be restored**. So, this Lenten season, starting with Ash Wednesday, we will look at various aspects of forgiveness and how we encounter it in the Church and in our lives. The series is called *Repentance, Forgiveness and Restoration*. Each Wednesday, we will have a text/reading that focuses on a main component. By the end of the six weeks, hopefully, we will not only have a better understanding of forgiveness, but are better practitioners of it. So, what are some of the components we will explore?

Sin

Sin itself is widely misunderstood and talked about in “not-helpful” ways. We talk about sin as “mistakes” and “brokenness (not our fault)” and even something we could “do better”. But is that it? We will take a moment (using *Psalms 51*) to come to **a basic foundational understanding just what sin is, who we sin against, and why it must be dealt with on deep, personal level** before any forgiveness and restoration may happen.

God’s Forgiveness of Us

We truly cannot forgive another if God first doesn’t forgive us. If we are not reconciled to God through and in Christ, we have no true ability to practice forgiveness. We cannot forgive ourselves! This doesn’t mean people can’t “patch things up” or “go along to get along”...it actually means that THAT is part of the problem with our wrong application of forgiveness! We will look at the sinful woman of *John 8* and how she goes to the *source for forgiveness*. It is only from that source that she can go on living in a community of faith.

Sinful Humans Trying to Forgive Others

How can we forgive when we ourselves are in need of forgiveness? This is so messy, but so common—**people who have wronged us are also (in some way) wronged by us**. Who goes first? Who’s right and wrong? Is it sincere? How many times do we keep forgiving others...for the same thing? What if one party refuses to reconcile?

The other component to this is the inability to “forget”. “I’ll forgive but never forget!” What does that mean? It is biblical? We hang onto past grievances so tightly that we become choked by our own resentment...even when we’ve “forgiven”. So, what does Jesus say about all of this in *Matthew 18*?

Forgiving Those We Don't Want To

Then there are the people who we just don't want to forgive...even if they're sorry. We don't think it's fair that they receive God's grace and mercy! The *story of Jonah* is a classic tale of this problem. **The ending of Jonah, though, gives us a window into God's heart.** While we might not "want to", we are directed to forgive ones who are truly repentant and ask for forgiveness...even if we don't think they deserve it!

Where Do We Turn When We Have Nowhere Else to God?

To those of us who are secure in the knowledge of the Lord's forgiveness, this might be second-nature. But to others who have forgotten or have despaired over their sin, sometimes it's difficult to believe that God in Christ truly forgives every single sin. **The key is knowing where to turn.** We look at one of the thieves on the cross, who in his desperation turns to the right place.

We also consider the other thief. Isn't Jesus supposed to forgive him too? What about people who are sorry but refuse to turn to Christ? Does God turn His back on them? Does Jesus forgive anyway? We wrestle with these questions as well.

The Aftermath of Forgiveness—Restoration and Healing

We also consider the aftermath—**what does a life of faith look like?** Do we have any patterns to imitate? As it turns out...yes! WE HAVE GOD. We take a "deep dive" into Ephesians 5 and Paul's imperative to be "imitators". What does it mean to imitate God? How does a life of faith play out in a world that increasingly rejects Christ?

Flowing from this, we can then see how true healing begins to happen. We don't simply get over things, we actually are changed and transformed as God's dear children. In this, true forgiveness can happen and healing begin.

Here is the schedule for the Lenten Midweek Services (**Wednesdays at 6pm**):

February 22nd: Ash Wednesday and *Psalm 51* "A Very Personal Problem"

March 1st: Midweek One and *John 7:53-8:11* "The Maker of Forgiveness"

March 8th: Midweek Two and the *Story of Jonah* "Forgiven in Spite of Fair"

March 15th: Midweek Three and *Matthew 18:21-35* "How Many?! That Much!?"

March 22nd: Midweek Four and *Luke 23:39-43* "Turning to the Right Place"

March 29th: Midweek Five and *Ephesians 4:31-5:2* "Imitators"

Lent is the season of the Church Year that is built-in that we might not only reflect on the works and words of Jesus that leads us to Holy Week, but the time we are given to reflect on our lives

of sin, of faith, and of hope. It is a time to “get in touch” with our sin and a time to “get in touch” with our Savior (once again). It is an opportunity to go deeper into the things of God, shown us in the Scriptures, given to us in the Church.

Please consider coming to Lenten services this year. My hope is that there is a personal word that can be spoken to you, no matter your background, relationship history, current walk of life. This series is a full, connected conversation. In other words, if you only part of the conversation...you only hear a part of the conversation. So, come to every service as we deeply explore what God’s Word says about *Repentance, Forgiveness and Restoration*.