

**As I begin today...I don't have a cute story or a joke,
but I have a very important detail to point out ...**

**Our reading, this afternoon says that it was the DISCIPLES
who gathered in the room in which Jesus appears...**

It was the DISCIPLES to whom Jesus wishes his Peace,

It was the Disciples whom he sends forth,

It was the Disciples on whom he breathed the Holy Spirit...

And it was the Disciples to whom he offers some instruction on forgiveness...

If you recall...the disciples were that very large group of people that followed Jesus...

the disciples included men AND women,

probably the children too, who came with the women and

yes....probably even some teenagers.

**All of this: the sending forth, receiving the Holy Spirit, the gift of Peace and the
instructions to forgive are given to the Disciples: not just the 12 male Apostles.**

All of the grace

All of the gift

All of the freedom, the opportunity of today's reading

is offered to everyone, bar none.

Unfortunately, and I do mean unfortunately,

the opportunity to offer forgiveness has often been limited to a few select men

to the detriment of the entire world..

Now, that being said...Let's talk a bit about forgiveness

**As I was preparing for today, I thought what could I possibly add to the conversation
about forgiveness?**

There are volumes and volumes of books written on forgiveness...

Thousands of sermons on Forgiveness...

workshops, seminars, retreats...what

hasn't been said about forgiveness???

and Yet for all of that...

I would have to believe that it is one of the least practiced of Spiritual disciples...

the one still greatly misunderstood,

perhaps it is the one most resisted...

Why? That is a very long conversation,

but I would like to share something that I heard in

seminary that has truly helped me in forgiving the tough situations

and the difficult people in my life...

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says:

“Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.”

We have all heard those words, I bet...

Well, my professor suggested that the reason Jesus asked Yahweh to forgive them,

the Romans, his persecutors

was because he couldn't...

He was in so much, it was so unjust, at that moment in time,

Jesus could not forgive his persecutors.

Mmmm...

The professor went on to say that he thought, more than likely, Jesus intellectually, up in his head... knew they didn't understand the travesty, the awfulness of their actions...

Jesus knew that so many of them were caught up in the energy of the mob...

He knew or perhaps he hoped that if they could really see what was happening,

who he was, and why he lived and taught like he had...

perhaps they wouldn't have inflicted this horrible punishment upon him...

**He knew, intellectually, that they acted out of fear and ignorance...
but still he could not forgive them...**

**Perhaps the best he could do, would be to ask God, his Father, to forgive them.
Perhaps the best he could do would be to ask Yahweh, the Holy One of the Cosmos
not to hold their actions against them, even as he hung on a cross.**

**This biblical insight offered to me so long ago
has continued to offer gift and grace in my life...**

**I would be willing to bet that each of us, all of us
have already forgiven lots of people and lots of situations in our lives.
We are not strangers in this land of forgiveness.
All of us, hopefully, have sought forgiveness from someone else..**

**But I would also be willing to bet that some of us, perhaps all of us
has someone or some situation that we can't get there yet..
that we can not, yet, honestly say that we have forgiven them...
that we certainly haven't moved on, much less forgotten.**

**It is to these tough situations that the words of Jesus, while he hung on the cross...
speaks so eloquently....
they offer us all a way through, a wisdom way of living, loving and a holy way of forgiving:**

**“ABBA, forgive him...
Holy One, forgive her...
God of the Cosmos...forgive them...they know not what they do”**

**When we can't forgive what has been done to us...
we *can* turn to God and ask that God do the forgiving for us...**

If we can at least get ourselves to that point: being willing to let God forgive them or him or her or it...

I truly believe God will do the rest...

We will find that a lot of our anger, our sense of righteous indignation, our sense of 'poor me', will diminished on its own without our having to do much else, Most of the time it happens very gradually, like a melting or a dissolving of our hard emotions....

But even then...in some very terrible, very difficult situations... for some of us even trying to get to that point of asking God to forgive what we can not.... might be more than we can do...

Sometimes whatever it is, is so horrible, that perhaps we don't want anyone to forgive what has been done.

We must remember, though, that forgiving is not saying that it didn't matter...

it is not saying that it wasn't important or horrible...

it is not saying that we have to be in relationship with the person and it is certainly not saying that we have to be willing to let ourselves be harmed again...

We would do well to recognize that forgiveness is freedom from reliving the pain over and over and over again...

If we stay there, if we chose to be unwilling to forgive, if we choose resentment, anger, righteous indignation, it is like drinking a poison and then waiting for the other person to die...

We harm ourselves...

We keep the pain alive in our lives,

We hurt ourselves over and over again....

I think that is why Jesus said:

**“The sins that you forgive are forgiven them,
the sins that you retain are retained.”**

IT IS NOT ABOUT THEM!!....IT IS ABOUT US...

The wisdom of Jesus and of Luke...

**is the wisdom of offering us a way to freedom
even when WE can not forgive.**

We will experience the liberation of forgiveness

when we can forgive or even when God forgives for us...

If we struggle with asking God to forgive..

then we ought to ask God for the desire to ask God to forgive...

and when we do that, even then we can feel the chains of the past beginning to loosen.

Forgiveness.... is the way to freedom...

it is the way to peace...

it is the way of discipleship...

it is the way all of us invited to walk.

and it certainly is not a tiny detail.

amen

