

THE LORD'S PRAY (part 4)
"Forgive us Our Sins"
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Steven M. Conger

(Luke 5:17-26 NRSV) One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. {18} Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; {19} but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. {20} When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." {21} Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" {22} When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? {23} Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? {24} But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he said to the one who was paralyzed--" I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home." {25} Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. {26} Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today."

Three weeks ago, Jeff and I began looking at the Lord's prayer. We continue this morning as we focus on some very difficult words —> "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

As many of you know, my wife Nancy is a runner — she has run (and completed) the Chicago Marathon, twice and will run again this fall.

I saw somewhere this week that Lance Armstrong is going to run in the New York marathon this fall. Repeatedly, we see people who are running — President Clinton and Bush both ran for exercise.

In Jesus day, if you were an important person, you did not run — you didn't even walk fast. To run would be a sign of lack of dignity.

Yet, there is a story that Jesus tells us in which a man is running, that is almost comparable to President Bush running each morning in a Speedo.

Listen to this story:

Luke 15:11-32

Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, "

Father, I want right now what's coming to me.'

"So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

That brought him to his senses. He said, "All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him,

Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father.

"When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: "

Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.'

"But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, "Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here — given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

"All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, "Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.'

"The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. The son said, "Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you

one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!

"His father said, "Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours — but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!"

Why was he running, in this story?
So that he could forgive his wayward son!

It seems to me that the concept of forgiveness is one of those that we have created a fascinating dualism.

On the one hand we — we throw out “I’m sorry’s” and “forgive me’s” as if it means nothing to seek forgiveness.
We trivialize it

If it feels good — needs no forgiveness

And if you are hurt — just go into hiding for a while and lick your wounds, and pretend it never happened

On the other hand — we sense that forgiveness is something that we can never do. — and sometimes it is something that we can never receive.

Instead of forgiveness — we often talk about tolerance

Barry Bonds — steroids and baseballs Home run record
Friday’s game when he hit a pop up and didn’t run to first and almost was doubled up — was he sorry — heck no, he’s Barry Bonds

But think about this for a minute — if the father in the story had intended to merely tolerate his son’s actions — he never would have been running down the street to him.

Forgiveness is hard
Forgiveness demands a lot from us

But Jesus says we must forgive

I think that is the thing about the Lord’s Prayer that I dislike the most.
Because it seems to me to say, that God will forgive me my sins only to the

extent that I forgive others their sins against me. I am not as good at forgiveness of others as I hope God is with me. I would probably be more comfortable if the line went, "Forgive us our sins BETTER THAN we forgive those who sin against us."

But that is clearly not what it says — nor what Jesus intends

We need to go back to remember what this prayer that Jesus is giving to us is all about.

It is a kingdom prayer.

It is teaching us what it means to live as partners in God's kingdom which is being ushered in.

- we have an intimate relationship with God who is a parent to us
- we are to seek God's agenda
 - Justice
 - Unity
 - Kindness
 and not our own
- we are to be good stewards of all that God gives us
- We need to share with those who don't have daily bread
- we are to forgive

John the Baptist, remember came bringing a "baptism for the repentance of sins."

Jesus takes John's message, and tells us to make it our lifestyle

Did you hear the Gospel lesson that was read this morning?

Jesus said:

"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk?'"

Jesus is calling us to make forgiveness our way of life.

Since we have received forgiveness — we are called to live forgiveness!

Tom Wright puts it well when he writes:

having received God's forgiveness themselves, they were to practice it amongst themselves. Not to do so would mean they hadn't grasped what was going on. As soon as someone in one of these Jesus-cells refused to forgive a fellow-member, he or she was saying, in effect, 'I don't really believe the Kingdom has arrived. I don't think the

forgiveness of Sins has actually occurred.’ Failure to forgive one another wasn’t a matter of failing to live up to a new bit of moral teaching. It was cutting off the branch you were sitting on. The only reason for being Kingdom-people, for being Jesus’ people, was that the forgiveness of sins was happening; so if you didn’t live forgiveness, you were denying the very basis of your own new existence.

We don’t forgive to earn forgiveness — we forgive because we have already been forgiven!

History is filled with the debris and destruction left behind where forgiveness is wanting:

the Hatfields and the McCoys,
 the Irish and the English,
 the Palestinians and the Israelis,
 the Pakistanis and the people of India
 American’s and people of middle eastern descent

And perhaps most destructive of all, the millions of families down through time who have been estranged, even through times of dying and death, due to bitter hard-heartedness.

Which brings us to an important question:

Does forgiveness require repentance or contrition?

If I wrong you and refuse to recognize my wrong, even defend it, can you — should you — forgive me?

Remember the motion picture, *The Mission*?

In it one of the male leads goes around dragging a huge wooden or metal object behind him by a chain. He is, as long as he has that mighty weight slowing him down, unable to use his energy for much else, unable to run or dance or be free.

I think we can compare that with us when we go around dragging a grudge against someone else, or dragging a wrong we know we have done someone else but can’t admit it, or when we go around dragging unnecessary and inappropriate guilt. We are sapped of spiritual energy; we are unable to dance the dance of life. And we are certainly not free.

Back to the question:

Can you — should you forgive me if I have wronged you but I am unrepentant, if I am anything but contrite?

Yes, because if you don’t forgive me we both are dragging those big awful weights around, but if you do forgive me in your heart, at least you will be free of life-deadening weight.

Forgiveness is not natural for us.

We like to hold on to the wrongness of others, contrasting it with what we would like to believe is the rightness of us.

In forgiving, we become part of a cosmic drama in which God refuses to let sin have the last word in the way the world is moving. To forgive, then, breaks a natural cycle of retribution and vengeance, of which the world has already seen too much.

Do you remember the sermon preached by Billy Graham just days after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Speaking at a nationally broadcast memorial service, Dr. Graham preached forgiveness. He must have known that the crowd was in no state of mind to forgive, but he apparently felt that his Christian duty was to encourage us in this Kingdom message.

This part of The Lord's Prayer, as with the entire prayer itself, is subversive of many societal values:

materialism,
violence,
and individualism.

In this part of the prayer about forgiveness, Christ is once again turning the world upside down by teaching us to pray for a forgiving heart rather than a vengeful one.

Christ's way is nothing short of life-changing and Kingdom-making.

Let me close with these words, written at least three thousand years ago and eventually called Psalm 103:

GOD is sheer mercy and grace;
not easily angered, he's rich in love.
He doesn't endlessly nag and scold,
nor hold grudges forever.
He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve,
nor pay us back in full for our wrongs.
As high as heaven is over the earth,
so strong is his love to those who fear him.
And as far as sunrise is from sunset,
he has separated us from our sins.
As parents feel for their children,
GOD feels for those who fear him.