

Dear Friends,

The gospel reading this week is the parable of the unforgiving servant from Matthew 18. It tells us of an appalling example of unreasonable behaviour. A servant who has just been forgiven an enormous debt, the equivalent of several years wages, then refuses to forgive the debt of a few coppers that were owed to him.

Jesus told the story, as with most of his stories, because he has something to teach us. We aren't forced to forgive those who do us wrong, there's no law about it. We aren't forced to forgive those who let us down, those who offend us or upset us in some way. But the forgiveness that we've received from God puts everything in a completely new light, it alters the circumstances totally. Like the unforgiving servant we aren't completely innocent. We make mistakes, we let others down. We have no right to condemn others or refuse to forgive them because we make the same mistakes ourselves.

We're aware that when we refuse to forgive someone else we're doing the wrong thing and that feeling remains with us. That's one of the reasons why Jesus stressed how important it is to forgive one another. He knew how important it is for our well-being, for our peace of mind.

Jesus knew what happens when we refuse to forgive someone. He knew that we can never have true peace of mind as long as we hold things against other people, as long as there are things that remain unforgiven. The resentment, the bitterness remains with us, it weighs us down, it twists us up inside. If we don't forgive someone it stays with us, it won't just disappear.

The resentment and the bitterness only disappear with forgiveness. Once something is forgiven then we can move on, we can move forward. Where there is a refusal to forgive the bitterness remains. It doesn't just remain, but it grows and spreads, often it draws in other people, it sours relationships and breaks them. The longer it isn't dealt with the more it spreads and the more people become involved.

It worries me deeply when I hear anyone describe anything as unforgivable, because where there is no forgiveness there is no true peace of mind. As far as Jesus was concerned there is nothing that can't be forgiven, nothing that is unforgivable. We remember that powerful scene when Jesus was hanging from the cross and forgave those who were putting him to that excruciating death. Jesus didn't just teach it he lived it out in his own life.

Best wishes,

Mark