

**A SERMON GIVEN BY REV. JULIUS TSIGA, ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEE  
UNIVERSITY PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**Sunday, July 20, 2008**

**Title: On Forgiving Others**

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:21-22; Genesis 45: 1-8

**Theme:** We may grasp some of the meaning of faith with closure, resolution, and clarity, but we also know that faith demands elements of mystery, candidness, curiosity, and confusion.

*John McCain and Barack Obama are telling the electorate what they would do if and when elected into office come November.*

Jesus also produced a manifesto of what qualities, principles, or standards of behavior were expected of those who were candidates of God's kingdom. These principles are found in Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount):

- To speak only the truth
- To forgive without measure
- To love one's enemies
- To avoid being judgmental
- To pray privately
- And many others

This morning we want to think together on the subject of forgiveness. To forgive. To be forgiven. We need to learn to forgive. We need to be willing to forgive and to be forgiven. This is just great. Is all this possible? What of the proverb: "To err is human but forgiveness is divine." If we are human, how can we forgive? In fact, as human beings, we will always err and so we'll need to be forgiven all the time. But Jesus says the opposite: because we are humans, we must be perfect, as our father is perfect. Because we are humans (created in the image of God), our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. No half-measures.

Notice the title of this sermon: "On Forgiving Others" not "On forgiving each other." It is you, being called to forgive others, without any expectation of your being forgiven.

Peter asks Jesus, "Must I forgive seven times?" Peter thought he was being generous because

Jewish culture required one to forgive twice only before retaliating on the third insult or injury or offense. Peter was expecting a good commendation from Jesus for being so generous. But Jesus says, "No, you forgive seventy times seven times equals four hundred and ninety times; i.e., always infinity.

Jesus is saying forgiveness brings a changed attitude, a new direction, and a new relationship, both to the giver (of forgiveness) and to the receiver.

To the giver: it says, you are God's son and you have worth. It also says you are also forgiven. To the receiver: it says, you are of value, you are a person. It also says forgive others. Having received forgiveness and new direction, disciples of Christ can then extend forgiveness to others daily (as in the Lord's Prayer) and forever (as in 490 times). Forgiveness speaks of new beginnings or continually fresh commitments to the ways of God. It is not just being, but also doing.

When Jesus says, "Follow me," he is calling us into a new kind of discipleship or Christianity. It is a radical discipleship. It is a discipleship that breaks down old barriers (of forgiving each other; i.e., a closed circle) and creates new relationships (by forgiving others). Is this easy or simple?

Once Mother Teresa was taking people on a tour of her hospital and she was talking about the role of fathers or husbands. She was asked if she was married. She said, "Yes – to Jesus and he is very demanding!" Yes, Jesus'

teachings can be so demanding, it's not easy to obey them. But as we learn one day at a time, we will learn to forgive eventually. But more so Jesus says "Take my yoke upon yourself, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." It is only through his grace that we can forgive others, that we can become radical Christians.

Let me share a few scenarios with you before looking at Joseph's story.

A. In the African context of Democracy, we have only "opponents." We have only players. You are either "with" or "against"; and if you are "against," then you are an "enemy" – and an "enemy" must be excluded from the community. So you are ostracized or annihilated!

So how does democracy work? African democracy talks about coercion, forced compliance, compromises, and contradictions.

People were devastated during the wars of liberation (and during the Zimbabwe elections). Can we talk of forgiving others, of forgiving them?

1. No – we can't forgive, because we think to forgive is to forget. (How can we forget these atrocities?)
2. No – we prefer justice over forgiveness.
3. No – we want reparations and restitutions.

But Christ calls us to forgive, because there is love and justice in forgiveness.

B. When Pope Benedict XVI visited the States a few months ago, he had the same message of apology for the sexual abuse of children by catholic clergy as he has for the Australians today. Is he being appreciated? The victim wants more than an apology – they want justice and compensations.

C. Lastly 9-11. Powerful America was struck in the face by a weak Al-Qaeda and Ben Laden. America was humiliated. But what was her reaction? To call for all her forces to crush this irritating bug. But maybe, only maybe, if a one voice had called for forgiveness, maybe the situation could be different.

How powerful is an attitude of forgiveness?

Let's see three examples from Joseph's story:

1. Joseph protected the receiver (his brothers). When we forgive, we protect the receiver. He sent everyone out so that they might not know what happened prior to this forgiveness. So that the Egyptians will continue to respect and like Joseph's brothers. If they knew how bad they had been, they would also hate them. We tell everybody what happened between me and my boss, me and my spouse, me and my children. Why? Not to seek sympathy, but so that they will hate them!
2. Joseph never mentioned the incident again. Even when they had other disagreements, he never brought it up. But in our situations, we are always bringing past incidents up. We don't become hysterical but historical recalling the past and showing where I forgave you.
3. Finally, forgiving others is a lifetime commitment. It's a direction, it's an attitude, it's a behavior. Joseph chose this and became this forgiving person.

So is it easy to be a forgiving person? No, it is not. But it is desirable. And when we work our lives towards it, Jesus will supply all our needs through his grace and the Holy Spirit. He will enable us to become forgiving people. God bless you. Amen.