

Thought for Sunday 27th September

Philippians 2:1-13

One sentence really stood out for me from today's reading, probably because it's the bit I struggle most with!

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

I can think of a handful of people without even trying, who Jesus probably doesn't have the same mindset about as I do! I'm sure we all can - I'm sure there are even one or two people that we'd really rather Jesus couldn't hear our thoughts about!

We can't escape it, and it's part of the nature of humanity, that we won't get on with everyone. With some people it might just be a personality clash, or we simply find them infuriating, with others, it may go much deeper to the way they've treated us or those we care about, and things they've said or done that have hurt us deeply - emotionally, physically or both.

There are some people in this world that truly don't deserve our forgiveness and would never acknowledge that they needed it.

But here's something we don't always fully grasp – God gets it, in fact, it's the way He designed us - forgiveness doesn't have to be a two way street. The person on the other end doesn't need to deserve it, doesn't even need to know, although sometimes it is important that they do.

Forgiveness is for the forgiver too.

There's that awful American expression 'closure' which perhaps comes the closest – certainly I can't really think of a British word which better explains what happens to us when we truly forgive.

Forgiveness is not a passive act. It's an active, ongoing, wilful process. Forgiving someone when they do us wrong is an act of will not of feelings. Sometimes we are lucky enough to be able to forgive someone and move on, other times it's a decision we have to make over and over again, each time we are reminded of their actions. Our memories are far too long for forgiveness to come easily to us.

But when we do forgive, and forgive persistently, we are transformed into Christ's likeness once again. We are free to face our past and the actions of others. We are freed from the fear and the pain and the anger. However justifiable those emotions are, they have no effect on the perpetrator, but they can have a profound effect on us. Anxiety, doubt, self-loathing, anger, bitterness, fear, lack of trust... they all take a very heavy toll. I'm not saying it will be easy, it won't. I'm not saying we'll never have these feelings again. I'm saying that when we forgive others, we begin the journey of recovery. Sometimes forgiveness is an act of defiance – a refusal to allow someone who's done us wrong to keep control over us. Jesus' act of forgiveness was certainly defiant. It might have looked like weakness from the outside, but it was in fact the ultimate act of strength.

Jesus knows about the cost of forgiveness – he paid the ultimate price for ours. He reminds us that the price of not forgiving is higher still, both here and in heaven...

We can't with the same breath curse someone and acknowledge that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Paul talks about humbleness and obedience. We cannot take on the nature of a servant whilst we hold ourselves up as better than someone else. We cannot be obedient if we refuse the request God makes of us.

Each time we meet together, we say the Lord's prayer. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

So today I challenge each of us to forgive wilfully, and with purpose. To forgive others and accept God's forgiveness and to begin that journey of recovery, to free ourselves from the ties that hate creates and follow God's will.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose." *Rachel Swatton - LLM*