

"WHAT DO YOU DO WITH FORGIVENESS?"

psalm 103, romans 5: 1-11

TFBC, Oct. 1, 2008

Communion Meditation

I. If you have made your way through a crowd lately, you probably have had to say a time or two, "Pardon Me!" We get in each other's way and have to navigate the logjam of people. 'Pardon me!' Its really just a nice way of saying "Get out of my way!"

With an adolescent growing up in your house you may have experienced what we did. Will learned that a good roaring burb made a boy feel good and got great attention from friends and family alike! "Pardon me!" we would say for him, in hopes he would soon pick up the needed phrase!

A. Pardon is a term we hear at the end of Presidential terms as well. It is an action by which the US Constitution provides the President the power to grant reprieves and full pardons for offenses against the US. Our Presidents have used this power freely throughout our history, *George Washington*, the first to use it. He offered this to individuals convicted of treason following the Revolutionary war. He used it to begin a healing process in the nation that the law couldn't provide!

Thomas Jefferson pardoned persons convicted under the Alien and Sedition Act. *Nixon* issued 863, with the most notable to Jimmy Hoffa, head of the Teamsters Union, for misappropriation of funds. Then *Gerald Ford* stunned the nation as he offered pardon to Richard Nixon. *Jimmy Carter* extended 534, to include amnesty to those who evaded the Vietnam War. And *Reagan* pardoned George Steinbrenner for illegal campaign contributions

to Nixon. *Bill Clinton* created a flap when he pardoned a billionaire fugitive, Marc Rich. And the list goes on.

B. What an array of angry responses these pardons draw: from confusion to protest to outrage, because pardon is perceived as an undeserved political payback! It smacks of cronyism. It appears to be connected to the right people in the right places rather than to justice.

Pardons! They are nothing new. British Monarchs have had the power. Kings through the ages have had it, sometimes for influence, sometimes to administer justice with mercy, sometimes to consolidate political power. The purposes may not be so clear in our society. Questions of accountability, crime, guilt, punishment, fairness, lead us to ask, "*Is justice for some but not for all?*"

II. I am no legal buff, certainly no expert on the American Legal System, but I know there are great truths about God's pardoning actions. These run all throughout the New Testament and affect us all here. Romans 8 begins with these assurances: "*There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because through Him the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.*" Romans 5 says, "*We have peace with God;*" that we "*stand under grace;*" that we have been "*justified by His blood.*"

And the basis of it all is the Love of God! In verse 5, the Bible says, "*God has poured out His love into our hearts...*" That is the difference from the Presidential pardons so often associated with power and money. The Bible says once we were "*enemies of God,*" or at odds with God. Yet now we are declared NOT GUILTY, unpunishable..... all because of the LOVE of GOD.

It is wonderful to watch a person discover and experience the pardon of God. I have a friend, a young deacon in my former church who was sentenced to 18 months in a federal prison for a pollution, or an environmental hazard excess. His company dumped gallons daily into one of the local rivers where shrimp boats trolled loading up the shrimp now tainted with mercury. It is one of the leading causes of cancer producing poisons. You may be thinking as many in that community of Brunswick, Georgia of Glynn County, *"Yeah, He deserved it! Lock him up and throw away the key!"* And most of us could agree, as the cancer rate among the innocent rose considerably in those 15 years of birth rates.

But I have to ask, Do you think God would have a similar perspective on the ways we have conducted our lives? It is the well known scripture of Romans that says, *"All have sinned,"* and that includes you and me. Yet we meet a lot of people who do not want to admit they have done much wrong during their lives. Whole groups of upstanding people and some of them in fine churches do not especially feel they need to be pardoned for anything.

Paul thought that way once. I read to you from Philippians 3 last week, as Paul said, *"If you boast, I have more reason to"....*and he proceeded to rattle off his proper religious credentials, training, education, and as the final proof, his zeal to protect the church by persecuting the dissident Christians! *"Faultless!"* he proclaimed. He had felt no compelling reason to be pardoned by God!

Eventually the disciples came to realize the pathway to knowing God and receiving His redemption was through the CROSS, that everyone needs a pardon regardless of their life story. Read it in Romans 3:1, *"There is no one righteous, not even one!"* Besides,

if the church was made for saints instead of sinners, none of us would have been allowed inside!

How alike we all are here. We all need a new lease on life that only comes when we humble ourselves before God and cry out for mercy, and find forgiveness, real pardon for our sinfulness, our pride, our self-serving ways. We are to be set free from misdeeds, indiscretions, sinful attitudes.

III. But there is more to life than being pardoned by God in Christ. **There is the pardoning of one another.** This is the proof that the real experience is real in you. The Gospel is about being pardoned by God AND about me pardoning others. And the power to do so, to be Christ-like, to be free from the horrendous burden of your own guilt is to let your own pain go, to give it up, to acknowledge the scripture, that "all have sinned and come short of God's glorious plans of real soul freedom and peace for us!" We need God's Pardon! Me and you! All of us. And it is a measurable quantity. We will pardon other people their failures, even the personal ones.

Today I invite you to The Lord's table.

This is the table of PARDON, of FORGIVENESS.

It is meant to be received, to be proved by the power to share it equally, and then to be lived confidently.

Come! It is God's gift freely given. Come! Freely receive it!

END

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