

Nine-Eleven, Eleven Devotional
Matthew 18:21-35
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In the 2010 movie "True Grit", young Mattie Ross looking for the murderer of her father says at the start of the movie, "You must pay for everything in this world, one way or another. There is nothing free except the grace of God. If not for this grace, what would bring redemption?" This is truth. All of us are sinners and all can receive God's Grace. In light of our decade of 9/11 we have been paying for events "one way or another." To heal the trick is we must ask God to remind us of grace.

In Matthew's Gospel, 18 21-35, the disciple Peter has heard Jesus talk about forgiveness. As Peter listens you know he is looking at Andrew his biological brother. How many times has Andrew bested Peter? Andrew was smarter and went looking for faith before Peter did. So Peter slides up to Jesus as he looks at the "innocent" Andrew, "How many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me, seven times?" Jesus says "Not seven but seventy seven time seven." Then a parable about a slave who can't forgive the debts of others after his huge debt is forgiven. That slave who can't forgive is placed into prison with no hope and torture.

Jesus says we must "forgive our brother from our heart." The answer in light of this text is: Forgiveness is given if asked for, no matter how often one is sinned against and no matter how large the debt. Such is the quality of God's grace and mercy. But the human soul is a limited resource of forgiveness. Yet, if you don't forgive you place yourself in an emotional pain ridden place of torture that is like a portable prison.

In light of the decade after 9/11 if you scan the editorials from the newspapers you hear talk of how the world has changed in the last ten years; three wars; the continued use of our technology as a weapon against us; worldwide, we are in an economic war; we are more aware of Muslims in our midst. Intellectuals and politicians of all stripes are asking, "In the dust, smoke, and debris of 9/11 have the last ten years of conflict and battle been protection or vengeance, are we still in a "just war? The words of Mattie Ross come to us now, "You must pay for everything in this world one way or another, nothing is free." Any human action, good or bad, always has a cost.

Can we forgive those terrorists who create fear, pain, death and kill our people and loved ones? No doubt about where Jesus is on the subject: We must forgive and forget -- until it hurts. Forgiveness is necessary because of what it does for our souls releasing us from an emotional prison of pain; Forgiveness does not let the bad guy off the hook; indeed. Forgiveness is about our own issues.

There is something deeper here we have to release in an act of forgiveness about 9/11. It is not just about forgiving terrorists and their organizations and nations. It is so much deeper than that. 9/11 and the following decade has created a change in our very being. Some things we can't forget much less forgive. Nothing is free in this world. Examples...

- In light of God's forgiveness, with what I saw as a chaplain at Dover's mortuary last year, it's not only military family after family in grief needing to forgive, but the hearts of those working with the dead now stained with the images of how our beloved American warriors were killed?
- In light of God's forgiveness how does a young American warrior erase the memory of killing another human being in the act of war especially if that death was close up and personal?
- In the light of God's forgiveness, how does a military family regain the loss of time, energy, and events because their mother or father was deployed?
- In light of God's forgiveness, how does someone forgive when they think they had not done enough to save their friend who was killed?

9/11 and it's after effects are with us forever. You must pay for everything in this world one way or another; nothing is free but the grace of God. You must know that it is God who forgives sin and wrongdoing. Our forgiveness is our small attempt to join in God's greater acts of mercy. The only being who can forgive forever with no boundaries is Jesus Christ our Lord. Humans do not have the inner resources to forgive forever infinitely.

We have to remember that the first word of Jesus on the cross is about forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Our minds are quick to think that Jesus is forgiving those who put him on the cross," But Jesus in his humanity is asking God to forgive since he can't do it until after the Resurrection. He can't forgive those with the hammer, sneer, and hatred, but he can call on God the Father to forgive them.

To reflect on 9/11 we have to call on the resurrected Christ to forgive those who did damage on our psyche. We don't have the time or the emotional energy in our lives to focus on all the offenses that come to us. Like Jesus on the cross in prayer, we can lift up those who have hurt us terribly, and trust God to include them in an act of forgiveness that is beyond our abilities as hurt and suffering human beings.

Faith is built on our sorrows, fears, anguish and struggles. No issues; no faith

- Forgiveness is not saying that everything's okay. It isn't.
- Forgiveness is not saying we no longer feel the pain of the event. We do.

So now chaplain, how do we give that anguish to Jesus and forgive? First, turn to prayer. Because human beings are made by God to talk and get things out of our system through talk-talk to God about your pain and your inability to forgive. Get it off your chest and into God's ears. Second, break down the crises into small parts that you can deal with. Make it simple. Third, seek the positive and see God's grace. Don't focus on what was lost but what you have left to work with. Then lastly, and it's been scientifically proven to make you healthier, help others. Helping others in Christ's name transforms you into a world changer and that brings peace into your heart.