

Copyright Geist Christian Church, March 10, 2024

Series: Wandering Hearts: Figuring Out Faith with Peter

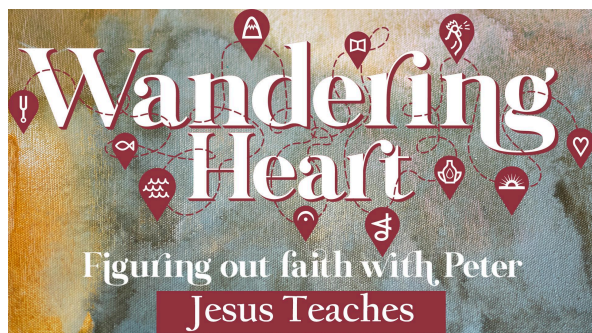
Sermon Title: Jesus Teaches

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Text: [Matthew 18:15-22](#)

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So when Danny asked me if I'd like to preach during Lent, what was my response to be? "YES! Let me back up there!" "Nah.....I'm good." Or maybe, "Because Lent is such a thought-provoking, spiritual time in the lives of most Christians, who am I to preach during this time?"

I am learning to stretch my comfort zones and trust in what others see in me that I am I cannot see clearly. I am trusting that I am where God wants me to be because I said "yes" to His call. And then I found out it was going to happen on St. Patty's day; I was all in!! Any excuse to "dress up," celebrate, and wear green!

I wanted to give you a few St. Patrick facts in honor of today as well. St. Patrick was born in Britain in the late 4th century and was kidnapped at age 16 and taken as a slave to Ireland. He eventually escaped but returned to Ireland around the year 432 to convert the Irish to Christianity. By the time he died on March 17, 461, he had established many monasteries, churches, and schools. He taught people about the holy trinity using the symbol of the shamrock. St. Patrick was able to spread the love of God—to show people the life Jesus wants them to live.

We are winding down this series as we near Easter, and the series has shown us a glimpse into the life of Simon Peter, one of the most relatable subjects in the Bible. He is human. He makes mistakes. He is forgiven. He is human. He makes mistakes. He is forgiven. Put that on repeat. Sound familiar?

Peter longs to be taught by Jesus. He asks lots of questions and is learning to ask follow-up questions. He may not always like the answers as they are often not straightforward, but he is always curious. Jesus often gives answers in the gray area, which is hard for those of us who are black-and-white thinkers.

Since last week's text, Jesus has been transfigured high on a mountain, has cured a little boy, and continues to speak of his death and resurrection. The disciples are now in Capernaum, where Jesus is teaching about sins and forgiveness. Jesus is sharing his teachings through stories. He is in his parable era (Had to get a T Swift reference in here somehow.)

The scripture today is Matthew 18: 15-22. I want to give you an idea of what is happening in Matthew around this scripture. Just before these words, Jesus had just told his disciples that they must return and start over like children or they aren't going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. And don't you think about hurting one of these childlike believers because they have angels watching over them and reporting to God. Then he tells the parable about the lost sheep. If one goes missing, he'll leave the other 99 behind to go look for that one and then make a big deal out of that one lost sheep because God doesn't want to lose any of these believers. And then we get to the scripture:

"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him-work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love. Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there." (Matthew 18:15-20)

I'm saving the last 2 verses for later. So now we know what we get to talk about today—forgiveness. What a fun topic, right? How many of us are harboring some kind of resentment right now? And God says we shouldn't do so if we want to be with Him. So what do we do?

Let's take a look at what the Merriam Webster dictionary has to say about some of the words we will discuss today:

To forgive is...

- : to cease to feel resentment against (an offender)
- : to give up resentment of or claim requital for

Forgiveness is...

- : the act of forgiving

Resentment is...

- : a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury

Resentment can eat away at you. It grows bitterness in our hearts and stress in our lives, which can cause real physical symptoms like high blood pressure, ulcers, heart problems, and others, and this is backed by science at the Mayo Clinic, John Hopkins, and my senior year high school term paper: “Stress - The Silent Killer.” I got an A!

So why do we invite this into our lives? Well, we are human. When we believe we have been wronged, we want others to be held accountable. It’s human nature I presume. I have some resentment in my own life that I’ve been holding onto for years. I’m not proud of it, but it’s kind of become comfortable in a sense. Maybe some of you have a bit of this as well. Is this healthy? Is this right? Absolutely not! After studying these scriptures I know this can’t continue. I must do better. But how? Why? Who must we forgive? EVERYONE? Does forgiving mean forgetting?

Jeffrey Curtis Poor is a pastor, writer, and church planter. He wrote an article in 2022 that addresses a lot of these questions. Why? We must forgive because we have been forgiven. The prayer that Jesus taught us says, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us.” Right there. We say this prayer every week. We said it just a few minutes ago. It comes out of our mouths so freely, yet how often do we really think about what it is we are saying and asking for?

We all need forgiveness. And in order to be forgiven, we must first forgive. We can’t love God and hate a person he has created in his likeness. Forgiveness sets us free. Don’t let the hurt sit and fester. Remember my term paper title—“Stress - The Silent Killer.” Forgiveness is for everyone.

Most of us may remember the 1965 song by Jackie DeShannonL “What the World Needs Now Is Love.” Forgiveness can be a form of love—at least God’s love, and when you think of it this way the words of the song really can speak to your heart.

“What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No, not just for some but for everyone...”

This is a hard one. Those who have been in some horrific situations need to know that the forgiveness is for themselves—and counseling is a wonderful tool to aid in this step. We also need to remember that forgiveness isn’t about forgetting. Forgiveness just means we are ready to move on in many situations—to let go of the debt that is owed us.

Forgiveness also isn’t always fair. In life, like the Rolling Stones said,

“You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime you'll find
You get what you need”

AMEN. This has been an anthem in my own life. We may think we know what we want and where we are headed and then *bam!* But God never leaves our side. He is there when we call. We just need to remember to be still and really listen.

Now we get to the last part of our scripture today, verses 21-22:

21 "At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?" 22 "Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven."
(Matthew 18: 21-22)

The Jewish custom of the time thought that forgiving someone more than three times was unnecessary. We see this through the Old Testament, so it is believed that Peter may have been thinking, "I'll top that three and go for seven." Surely that will impress him. But that was Peter in his humanly form, thinking of the limited law of the land and not the unlimitedness of Heaven. Because Jesus does some "spiritual" math and says **seventy times seven**. Meaning basically, you forgive always. There is no limit. Just like there is no limit to God's grace. It is given freely and abundantly. So forgiveness is not a one-and-done thing. You must turn the other cheek, *but* you don't have to stay there and continue getting "slapped." Oh NO! You just move yourself right on out of there.

Sometimes we have to do this for our own safety or sanity, but we are still called to forgive. Forgiveness is a big deal for Jesus so it in turn needs to be a big deal for us.

Corrie ten Boom is a holocaust survivor and the author of a book titled *The Hiding Place*. Her family sheltered some jewish people during WWII in Holland. She and her sister were arrested and put into Ravensbruck concentration camp. In 1947, a couple years after the war had ended, she was speaking at a church in Munich. There she was confronted by a man who had been a guard at the concentration camp where she and her sister were held. He told her that he had become a Christian after the war and knows that God has forgiven him for the horrible things he has done, but he wanted her forgiveness. She had said in her talk that "all our sins are at the bottom of the sea."

So he was asking her to forgive. What was she to do? All the horrific memories flooded through her mind. Her sister had died there. How can she forgive? The guard held out his hand, asking for forgiveness. She knew what she had to do: forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. But how? She says, "Forgiveness is an act of the will and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart." She silently screamed, "Jesus help me!" Somehow she mechanically lifted her hand to his and something incredible took place. A current went through her and the healing warmth seemed to flood her whole being, bringing her to tears. She said she had never known God's love so intensely as she did then.

I can't even imagine. If Corrie ten Boom can forgive such atrocities, how can I not forgive the one whom I hold resentment against in my life?

I found this quote. I'm not sure who it's by, but it just spoke to me: "The longer we walk in the garden, the more likely we are to smell the flowers. The more we immerse ourselves in God's grace, the more likely we are to extend grace to others."

Jesus wants us to forgive; he needs us to forgive so that we can live a life close to him. The rules are set out for us—seek to be forgiven or to forgive. Not just once but as many times and as long as it takes. Just like God doesn't forgive us just once (thank goodness for Peter and ourselves), there is immeasurable grace given to us.

Return to be childlike believers—innocent and full of life—seeking God's approval. Let's not lose one of us along the journey!

Pray. Ask for help if needed. A counselor can be very healthy and helpful in your forgiveness journey! Do not do this alone. Jesus wants to help.

Take time. Sometimes we need to take a bit of time before we are ready to forgive. Just make sure you ultimately do offer or seek the forgiveness needed.

I have to believe that St. Patrick was able to forgive those people who had kidnapped/wronged him in his youth and looked at life through the rainbow of grace and not with black-and-white lenses.

I'll leave you with this: You can't always get what you want, but you get what you need, and all we need is love, sweet love. Jesus' love and forgiveness is infinite and free for all who follow. Simon Peter learned this, and so must we. Once again, he is human. He makes mistakes. He is forgiven.

Let us pray: Dear Lord of mercy and forgiveness. We come to you knowing we have much work to do. Forgiving or asking to be forgiven is a daunting task but one that we must and will face for ourselves and for Your kin-dom. Much like Peter, we ask lots of questions; speak up when we should listen; try to impress the teacher when we are still so green. All the while, what we need to be doing is to be still so we can hear Your words, heed Your words, and implement Your words. Let us go into this week with renewed spirits for the tasks that lie ahead. It's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.