



To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:21

To be Christ -Like

Luke 6:36-38

Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged? Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

Don't you just love this passage from Scripture? It's the one I'll be having at my funeral service when that day comes along. No messing around, here it is in black and white, and it is simple! Of course, there's only one problem that I can see. I am not as merciful as I should be. I am not as forgiving as I should be, and I don't give nearly as much as I should. Yet, here it is. If you give you receive. If you are merciful, mercy will be given to you. If you do not judge you will not be judged either. So, again I ask myself-why is it so hard to live this amazing truth?

Let's start with mercy and forgiveness which really are the mirror image of each other. Let's look at some of the reasons why we can't forgive. Holding onto memories that hurt us is one reason for sure, doing so can be a toxic poison to our souls, but when it comes to hurt it is not so easy to empty the bin of mistrust that has collected in our heads. This 'attachment' to the garbage, if you will, gets stronger the more you think about what you perceive to be unjust, so the temptation is either to stew in our resentment or to push it to the back of our consciousness rather than allow ourselves to feel the pain, accept our part in it, take responsibility for our action or inaction and move forward! Hard to do when the voice of self-righteous anger is making all-the-noise of an out of tune orchestra, and leaves no room for silence.

Anger can be a good thing to motivate me to change or confront an injustice but when I am absorbed by anger it can lead to an imbalance and lack of self-control that can make me spiral into that dark place of brooding and even hatred. There can be a bitter desire for the other to be punished, to suffer as I am suffering and to understand what they have done to me. Why? Because it's all about me right? The truth is, if I allow myself go down that rabbit hole the only achievement will be to continue to wound myself and everyone around me, even the ones I love.

When I talk to children about reconciliation I always ask them how it feels when they are angry. They get the point very easily because they know it feels bad inside when you're hurt or upset, and they can pick up the vibe of someone else's anger or pain as well. They can soak it up like a sponge. Children understand the concept of right and wrong relationships, so we must give them the tools to work towards healing relationships when they go wrong.

Fear is another reason that holds us back from forgiveness. If I am afraid of being hurt it's easier to hold onto the pain so I never get hurt again. The only problem with that logic is that it literally stunts my growth. Hurt is not pleasant, it's terrible! Rejection or loss can leave you completely hollow and devoid of life and hope. Just getting out of bed in the morning can be a challenge. It is not a place that anyone can stay in for too long. At some point you have to lift your head to the sun and see the new day. New life does emerge, it can take time, but it does happen. The challenge is in how you accept responsibility for you own well-being and healing. A little bit of self-love can go a long way here! Change is an inevitable part of our journey. So is pain, and usually we learn from it, we grow from it, and we become better people because of it!

Next on the hit list-judgement and condemnation! This is the worst isn't it? Judgement and condemnation take self-righteousness to a whole new level, in a bad way, and we are all guilty of it at some point! Perhaps it's because we often rush into forming a judgement before examining our own insecurities about any given scandal! Everyone indulges in a little gossip from time to time. Even if you actively avoid it, you can find yourself talking about someone casually and before you know it the inner critic is unleashed!

Usually that inner critic is harsh, hypo-critical and full of self-righteous indignation. I had an example of this in my own life when a friend was cheating on his wife and wanted me to accept the fact that he had fallen in love with someone else. I was full of anger and resentment towards him for my perception of his betrayal towards his family. My reaction was reactionary-and the result was that I lost that friendship. I realized much later that my judgement was a direct result of my fear and insecurity about my own marriage. Since then I have always tried to examine my own feelings and insecurities about any given circumstance before opening my mouth! But seriously how hard is it?

I don't like to think of myself as a judgmental person but the fact is I make judgments all the time. I really hate that I do that, but if I'm honest I do. Is there anything good about judgment? I suppose I can judge things by my own moral code and decide if I think something is right or wrong. That's not offensive, but when I make a harsh judgment on a person that could cause them hurt, ridicule or slander, then it crosses into a very toxic and sinful arena. Any judgment we make should be cushioned with understanding and mercy or we are not living in the spirit of Christ, another challenge to think before we act. Personally, the older I get the more I prefer to take my lead from Pope Francis and ask myself the question "Who am I to judge?"

Last, but by no means least is generosity. I read one of the daily reflections the other day that really pulled me up. The author said “You do something for someone and pat yourself on your spiritual back.” It made me think about my desire to give to others. Is it because I care that others need support or is it an ego trip? When I sing at Mass is it really because I want to pray twice; or is it because deep down I’m looking for some kind of recognition for my efforts? Is my motivation love or a need to be liked, to be affirmed? Self-examination is an important part of our spiritual development. If we don’t question our motives how can we really serve God, and each other, authentically?

The other day a lovely lady came to the office to give her thanksgiving envelope, as so many of you have been during this Covid-19 crisis, I was struck by her faithfulness and commitment to the Church. She was a nonagenarian, yet she made the effort to come to the office to pay her contribution. This was coming from a place of love, a place of authentic faithful generosity, and it really moved me. We are blessed to have so many wonderful parishioners who continue to support the community in such a terrible time. I pray you all know how loved and appreciated you are.

Getting back to the reading, the nature of God’s abundant love, faithfulness, forgiveness, mercy and generosity pour out from the second part of the reading: Try putting the word abundant in front of all these words and use it as a mantra in your prayer.

Abundant love
Abundant faithfulness
Abundant forgiveness
Abundant mercy
Abundant generosity

This is our God but do we really believe it? If we truly knew God like this would we not strive to serve God with our whole being? Hopefully we can learn the lessons in this beautiful reading. For us as Christians, forgiveness is a choice; but it’s not an option. Judgement is for God alone to discern. Giving is not a chore but a blessing, because what we receive back is “overflowing” grace. This is what God’s love looks like. Give a little, receive a lot.

How can I keep from singing!