

'JESUS' Call to change our priorities

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[0 : 0 0] Jesus calls us to change our priorities. To put Jesus at the center of our lives is to open ourselves up to the transforming power of the love of God and opens us up to change the world for good.

When we remember Jesus' teaching about prayer, we recognize that Jesus pointed us consistently to the book of Psalms as the place where we could learn to pray.

It's evident in Jesus' ministry that he himself took the book of Psalms as his prayer book or his book that prompted his own prayers.

We do well if we become familiar with the book of Psalms. All the Psalms, all 150 of them. From the cross in Matthew's and in Mark's Gospel, we hear Jesus cry.

Sometimes we call it the cry of dereliction. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Come straight from the beginning of Psalm 22.

[1 : 2 4] My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? I have cried desperately for help, but still it does not come. During the day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.

I call it night, but get no rest. We hear the first words of the Psalm, but we do well to take into account the full of the Psalm when we think about Jesus' words on the cross.

The Psalm goes on to say, Can you imagine Jesus praying those words from the cross?

Not just the first words, but those words of the Psalm as well. The poor will eat as much as they want. Those who come to the Lord will praise him. May they prosper forever.

Future generations will serve him. They will speak of the Lord to coming generations. It's amazing to think Jesus meditated on that prayer from the cross.

[2 : 5 2] People not yet born will be told the Lord saved his people. All from the Psalm that begins, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

And from the cross in Luke's gospel, Jesus' words were, Forgive them, Father. They don't know what they're doing.

Forgive them, Father. They don't know what they're doing. I think both of these cries from the cross, recorded in Mark and Matthew and in Luke, have their beginning in the words Urban read for us from Mark's gospel.

The words where Jesus is predicting his passion and his death, his own cross, and inviting his disciples to take up their crosses in turn.

We need to ask ourselves, what was it that Jesus, in Jesus, that could look ahead and have acceptance of all that his life and his obedience to God would bring upon him in the cross?

[4 : 1 3] What was it in him that enabled him to look ahead and have that acceptance and have acceptance to the point that he had already challenged Peter's desire to protect Jesus from all of that?

Oh, far be it from you, Lord. That can't possibly happen to you. And Jesus says, No, get behind me, Satan. That thought is not of God.

I need to be on this path toward the cross. I think what it was, was a spirit of forgiveness that was in Jesus even in this moment in the gospel, way early in the gospel, long before the passion story itself.

Jesus is talking about his cross and his suffering, and he's doing it knowing that there will be those that need to be forgiven for what it is he's going to suffer.

And knowing not only that there will be those who need to be forgiven, but that he himself is already in a spirit of forgiveness because of what God has sent him to be and to do.

[5 : 22] You've heard me on this theme before, but it presses in upon me, this theme of forgiveness, as I read the text today, as I listen to the words of woman wisdom in Proverbs, and as we listen to the words of the psalm, praising the firmament and the sky and the beauty of creation and the word of God that guides us.

Jesus had a lot to say. The gospel is full of words and actions that proclaim forgiveness. Forgiveness has been spoken of in a number of different terms that I find quite helpful and I hope you'll find them helpful too.

If you're in a tug of war, forgiveness is when you drop the rope. If you're in a tug of war of words, forgiveness comes when you zip the lip and drop the rope.

Forgiveness is letting go of the resentment that is burning inside of you towards whoever it is that has offended you. Let go.

Let God. Let God. Turn it over. Live and let live. And one of my favorites, to have in one's mind and one's heart over something that we disagree profoundly with someone else about, you might be right.

[6 : 57] That's the spirit of forgiveness. You might not even be able to believe what you're saying when you say you might be right, but it's the first step.

You might be right. Every time I try to tighten the noose of resentment around someone else's neck, I'm really only choking myself.

today I will practice forgiveness instead. Or another one, unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is like taking poison yourself and expecting the other person to get sick.

It's kind of illogical, isn't it? Take the poison yourself and expect the other person to drop down. But by releasing resentment, I set myself free.

You see the spirit of Jesus in all of this? The spirit of Jesus talking to his disciples that day. Who do people say I am? Yes, Messiah. You say I'm the Messiah. Peter, you say I'm the Messiah.

[8 : 03] There's a lot more contained in that in terms of God's purpose for me and part of it is that I'm not going to exercise my power and my authority. I'm going to have a spirit of forgiveness and acceptance and together we're going to move through this and you, I invite to take up your cross as well, Peter.

We set ourselves free when we release resentment. We set ourselves free, we set others free. Forgiveness is the key.

Forgiving ourselves and forgiving the other person. So we have this rather stern challenge to Peter but you can sense how, not only how important it was for Jesus but also what it was taking from him.

Almost taking out of him to take this stance that he was going to go in obedience and not in resentment. Go in obedience to love and to care in such a way that he would be put on the cross.

In Deuteronomy, we read in this, this teaching is, it runs through the whole of scripture. Deuteronomy, you are still God's chosen people so then from now on be obedient to the Lord and stop being stubborn.

[9 : 31] If there's anything that's stubborn in us, it's resentment. That feeling that, it literally means re-feeling, re-feeling, re-feeling, the same thought and feeling and it goes like a wheel in your head and before you know it you've lost a day thinking about what you resent for all or you've lost an hour, you've lost your purpose.

Stop being stubborn, says the Lord. The Lord your God does not show partiality, he doesn't accept bribes, he makes sure that orphans and widows are treated fairly, in other words, the marginalized ones.

He loves the foreigners who live with our people and gives them food and clothes so then show love for these foreigners because they were once foreigners in Egypt. There is a lot of resentment kicking around in this country and in other countries in the western world about those who are coming in seeking refuge.

That's, when you hear that voice, it's a voice of resentment. And Deuteronomy, all the way back to Deuteronomy, show love for those foreigners because you were once foreigners in Egypt.

Or from Isaiah, is not this the fast I choose to undo the straps of the yoke. Now it's interesting, the straps of the yoke. I think we yoke ourselves when we take on resentment and hold grudges against others.

[11 : 03] Undo the straps of the yoke, let the oppressed go free, break every yoke. Now this would ordinarily be applied to things like slavery, oppression, actual physical oppression of others, but it can apply to the attitudes that preoccupy us that find others to be unacceptable.

Then, says the prophet, then shall your light break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up speedily. There's a lightness of being when you discover or rediscover the power of forgiveness.

cutting that cord of resentment. Forgiveness, says Richard Rohr, creates opportunities for growth.

The spirit within us creates a desire towards forgiveness and reconciliation, and the entire gospel of Jesus reveals the unfolding mystery of forgiveness.

It's the beginning, the middle, and the end of the gospel's message. It's God's forgiveness of us through Jesus Christ, isn't it? And when we lay hold on that forgiveness, when we recognize something of what it is we need to be forgiven for and find that forgiveness in God through Christ, then we are motivated to be forgiving people ourselves.

[12 : 25] The energy of being forgiven in our unworthiness of it, first of all, breaks us out of our merit-based mentality.

Well, I got here by my own straps. I'm a self-made person here. No, that's not the spirit that gets us to a place of forgiveness.

We have to get down off that ladder of meritocracy and come down and sit in the big circle where everyone is seated together. And when others come in, we just expand the circle and it just gets wider and bigger and we're part of the whole community under God.

Toward the end of life, perhaps you who are older might be feeling and discovering this. I trust and pray you are. there's a kind of universal forgiveness of everything, everything and everybody for being just who they are or what they are.

That's a spiritual movement in the heart of those. Maybe people discover it earlier in their life. Bless you if that's true. But as you get older, you come to realize there is no place for harboring such things as resentment and they work away against us.

[13 : 58] Grace recreates all things. Nothing new happens without forgiveness. We just keep repeating the same old patterns, illusions, and half-truths.

Sometimes grace doesn't come immediately, but like Job, we sit in the ashes, scraping our sores. But sometimes neither the desire nor the decision to forgive is actually present in us and we wonder what to do, how to move ourselves.

And this is a work of prayer, it's a work of grace, it's a work of spiritual discipline in our heart. To pray and to relate to Christ in such a way as we can let go.

And sometimes the moment of letting go surprises us. I read just this week about a woman reaching a stoplight when she was driving. And right there, unrelated to the stoplight, unrelated to the traffic, unrelated to that moment, something came upon her and she just found herself tearfully forgiving the person that grown.

Just a stoplight was the occasion. It was almost the message to her. Stop. Let go. Forgive. True spirit-led forgiveness always frees us and always heals.

[15 : 30] At least one of the parties involved, hopefully both. if it only preserves my moral high ground, like I'm going to condescend to forgive you.

That's not forgiveness. Not really. Not if we're holding on to that moral high ground as the magnanimous Christian person.

We can actually doubt whether that's forgiveness at all. all. One writer says, imagine if we had a sign painted on the front of our churches, not inside, but it could be inside too, outside, above the entrance of the church, all of our churches, and all it says in numbers is 70 times 7.

Some of you will know what I'm referring to. 70 times 7. Jesus' disciples asked him, how often do we have to forgive a brother that sins against us?

How often? Seven times? Jesus said, no, no, no. 70 times 7. It would be a wonderful reminder to us, wouldn't it be, if we saw that constantly and consistently in front of us.

[16 : 53] 70 times 7. Almost like our street address. Not Invergordon Parish Church, Invergordon, but Invergordon Parish Church, 70 times 7, Invergordon, would be our address.

And it would be our spiritual address too, because you see, community, the community we're seeking to build, community that we have become a part of, whether a long time ago or just recently, the community we seek to be part of is only possible.

Did you realize that's only possible with the spirit of forgiveness? The forgiveness that says, you are a brother or sister to me, and I am your sister or brother.

And that's the basis of how we are coming together. That's how we're able to come together. Not in judgment, because that fights against community, but in acceptance and forgiveness and welcome.

forgiveness doesn't happen, someone puts it even more bluntly, if forgiveness doesn't happen on a daily basis, at least imperfectly, because we don't always do it perfectly, there will be no community.

[18 : 10] We'll all eventually drift away and not want to be any part of each other. Without forgiveness, forgiveness, the logic of, I'm a victim and you're a perpetrator, you're doing this to me.

That logic rules. Instead of the divine logic of Jesus saying to his disciples, yes, I am the Messiah, but the Son of Man must suffer much and must be humble enough to accept that and even to forgive those who spitefully use him.

And only in that way will we come to unending communication and love and grace in relation to God.

Richard Rohr says, and with this I end, I once saw God's mercy as a kind of patient, benevolent, tolerance.

There he goes again. Look at him. There he goes again. A benevolent tolerance. A kind of grudging forgiveness. But now, says Richard Rohr, mercy has become for me, and he's an old man now, mercy has become for me God's own self- understanding.

[19 : 37] It's who God is at God's very heart. Mercy is a way to describe the mystery of forgiveness. More than a description of something, God does now and then.

It's who God is and how God is with us all. What a glorious gospel. What a glorious message that runs through the whole of the gospels of the New Testament.

It's there on the cross, Jesus speaking forgiveness, but it's there in all sorts of shadowed statements ahead of that cross, including his prediction of his passion.

And the invitation to us is to join in, become a part of that forgiving, powerful grace and love of God in our relationships with the people we find it hardest to love and to acknowledge and to be around and among.

May God bless the word to us, to us all today. Let us pray. Thank you, merciful God, for your constant love and your constant care for us and for all your creatures.

[21 : 00] thank you for your forgiveness, your grace, your mercy, that are with us and new every morning, indeed new every hour, indeed new every time we return to you.

We bless you for the world around us, for our freedom to enjoy and to explore. We thank you for the days and the seasons, that ground us, O God, in your eternal truth, in the truth of your love and forgiveness made known to us in Jesus, your Son.

We rejoice in the great tranquility when we rise early in the morning and walk outside and delight in the surroundings all around, the joyous laughter of children, the sound of the birds, all reminding us of the wonders of our lives.

We give thanks for the gifts we witness around us in green spaces, in music and creativity, support, encouragement, companionship.

and we thank you very, very warmly today, Lord, for our church communities and the wisdom in our shared heritage, for the gift of forgiveness and acceptance that we share with one another and the wonderful example of Jesus.

[22 : 44] Thank you, Lord. We give you thanks for a season's gifts. for the nourishment of body and soul, and acknowledge the movement of time in the phases of life and of death.

We pray, O God, for all those charged with creating and bringing change in our world, in attitudes, understandings, priorities, intent. We pray for political leaders to hold true to their calling as carers for our world and that all responsible for environmental decisions can see beyond immediate economic concerns and open up for us a vision for a truly shared world, enabling an environment of hope and speaking for the earth, for the burden of responsibility to be commune, to be shared, and all harmful agendas to be shelled.

love. We lift before you, O God, the young and vulnerable in our own community and church here and in every community. We pray for all in positions of trust with young people.

We remember all who tend the earth and all the animals, sustaining our existence through food grown, and those who nourish our emotional lives in friendship, family, companionship, laughter, and joy.

And we honor individuals known to us and remembered warmly by us who have shaped our patterns and understanding of worship, saints, martyrs, mystics, whose insights we value, whose example we honor.

[24 : 38] We bring the silent prayers from our own hearts to you, O God, now. remembering those thoughts of love and those where burdens lie heavy on our hearts.

and we pray, O God, that we may so live on earth that we are all prepared for meeting with you, O God, in our lives hereafter.

through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.