

Forgiveness--UUFVB Covenant Groups—March 2017

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Readings

“In South Africa, we chose to seek forgiveness rather than revenge. That choice averted a bloodbath. For every injustice, there is a choice...you can choose forgiveness or revenge, but revenge is always costly. Choosing forgiveness rather than retaliation ultimately serves to make you a stronger and freer person. Peace always comes to those who choose to forgive.” (*Rev. Desmond M. Tutu*)

Forgiveness is a strength. It is the most powerful thing you can do. It breaks the hold that has been put on your life, releasing you from the pain caused by the person or thing that was hurtful. Forgiveness is not a denial of what happened. It does not diminish the wrong done against you. It does not mean forgetting, does not require you to open yourself up to the offender to be hurt again; nor does it wait for the offender to apologize or earn forgiveness in some way. Forgiveness does not take away the consequences the other person will face because of his or her actions. Forgiveness is an act and a process. Even when a person decides to forgive another person, feelings of relief or healing are usually not immediate. Forgiving someone can be difficult and uncomfortable.

(*Boston Counseling Therapy; Cambridge Counseling and Life Coaching*)

Topic Exploration

In *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*, Psychologist Fred Luskin writes, “In careful scientific studies, forgiveness training has been shown to reduce depression, increase hopefulness, decrease anger, improve spiritual connection, [and] increase emotional self-confidence.”

But how does one forgive? **Desmond M. Tutu describes a Fourfold Path:**

- 1. Telling the Story**--Relate factually what happened to a trusted individual who listens carefully, or record what happened in a journal. Healing and reconciliation demand an honest reckoning.
- 2. Naming the Hurt**--Become clear with yourself in how what was done hurt you.
- 3. Granting Forgiveness**--This does not follow a timetable. It can happen in a matter of minutes, or it can take years depending on the nature of the hurt and the unique story of situation and emotion. No one has the right to tell you how quickly you should walk this path.
- 4. Renewing or Releasing the Relationship**--Once you have been able to forgive, the final step is to either renew or release the relationship you have with the one who has harmed you. It is a choice only you can make. It is a loss to release the relationship; renewing a relationship is a creative act; part of that is accepting responsibility for our part in any conflict. This can free us from being a victim and allows us to open our hearts. We are always at our best when compassion enables us to recognize the unique pressures and stories of the people on the other side of our conflicts.

Silent Moment of Reflection

Questions/Sharing

1. Is there anything that is unforgiveable?
2. Have you had the experience of forgiving? Did it follow the pattern Desmond Tutu outlined?
3. Have you experienced difficulty in forgiving an individual? A group? Yourself?
4. Have you ever sought and been denied forgiveness? How did that feel?
5. Should forgiveness always be a goal? Can there be a sense of peace and 'moving on' without forgiveness?
6. Is it more important to be understood or forgiven?

Closing readings

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime,
therefore, we are saved by hope.
Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete
sense in any immediate context of history.
Therefore, we are saved by faith.
Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone.
Therefore, we are saved by love.
No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint
of our friend or foe as from our own.
Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.
(Reinhold Neibuhr)

"It's hard to forget, but forgiveness is something you do for yourself." *(Azim Khamisa)*

Check-out and reflection on today's session

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping