

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 10 – God’s Grace is Forgiveness

But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 3: 21-26

The songwriting team of Bernie Taupin and Elton John are legendary. They have written so many great songs. But one particular song broke the mould of Bernie writing the lyrics Elton adding the music. This happened in 1975 when Elton sat down and wrote both the melody and most of the words to “Sorry seems to be the hardest word.” While the sentiment of this song is true in itself, is “sorry” actually the hardest word? I’m not sure. In fact, from my experience, it’s the words, “I forgive you” that are the hardest words.

Being unwilling or unable to forgive is probably the most destructive force known in the universe. Wars have been fought repeatedly because one nation has never got over what happened generations before. People have locked themselves away because they cannot move past something, either real or imagined, that turns their disappointment into anger and then brooding resentment.

Human forgiveness is not an action that is ultimately about the person or situation you are forgiving. But, it is fundamentally about yourself. Often the one you are called to forgive has blissfully moved on, totally oblivious to the situation or mayhem they have caused in your life. And even if they do absolutely understand what they have done and refuse to apologise, your anger or bitterness is not eating them up, but can totally consume yourself.

But, here’s the rub. Not one of us is perfect. We are all sinners. Indeed, in our ‘official’ UCA liturgy we come before God confessing that we have sinned in “thought, word and deed”. For us to harbour unforgiveness is to believe that we can take some kind of moral high-ground against our neighbours as if we are somehow blameless.

On the contrary, God is sinless...completely sinless. And yet God forgives every one who seeks forgiveness. For while forgiveness for our sinful nature is totally undeserved, it is the very nature of God to forgive. For God is pure love.

And, ultimately, the act of forgiveness is the most gracious act of love imaginable. When we forgive those who have sinned against us, we reflect the very same forgiveness that God grants to us. The difference is God is not freed by His forgiveness. After all God is totally free already. Instead, when we call on God to “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” we are freed from not just our sins or the guilt and shame of our sins, but find freedom in both our action of forgiveness and God’s action of grace.

The grace of God gives us what we desperately need instead of what we deserve. In our time of need God provides us with divine assistance. What is God’s grace? It allows us to live in freedom from our sin and enter back into relationship with God.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,
You are a forgiving and merciful Lord,
abounding in love to all who call upon You.
Thank You for granting forgiveness so freely to us who are so undeserving.
I pray that You'd overwhelm me with awareness of how much I've been forgiven
and that I'd be able to grant the same mercy to others who have wronged me.
Open my eyes to the trap caused by bitterness and enable me to find freedom by following Your example.
In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray.
Amen.