

A boy named Tommy was having difficulty in school because of a hearing problem was fitted with a hearing aid/ The device proved to be helpful and his work began to improve. But the aid was a problem too because some of his school mates teased him about his fake ears. One day, when the students were poking fun at him, Tommy lost his temper and punched his tormentor squarely in the nose. As the bloody nosed teaser was screaming in pain, the teacher intervned. She told Tommy to apologize to the other and forgive him ofr his teasing. Tommy thought it ove for a moment then said: "All right, I'll tell him I forgive him—but first I'm going to turn off my hearing aid".

Now if anyone had reason to be bitter and unforgiving, surely it was Jesus in the last wek of his life. His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane was not just the agony of facing physical death, altho that was ominously present. Jesus was struggling with the tempation to be bitter and unforgiving. He agonized over the terrible estangement from God that comes with bitterness and unforgiveness. Think a moment about that last week. The Palm Sunday srowd, so jubilant at his coming, then turning into a lynch mob before the week was over. Nowhere in the gospe is there evidence that anyone spoke for him at the end of the week. The religious leaders administer one cheap shot after another all week long. They come to Jesus with questions—not interested in the truth but trying to find something they can

use against him. Where were his friends. Peter to Rock can't even stay awake when Jesus asks him to keep watch, and before the week is out denies him. And there is Judas, of course. What hurts more than being betrayed by a friend. Even the Romans, who admitted they had no quarrel with Jesus, were already planning his death. Clearly, part of the struggle in Gethsemane was the struggle not to be bitter.

Jesus has told us over and over how much God loves us, and that the experience of his forgiveness is essential to our fulfillment as human beings. But he also warned us a number of times that this experience of God's forgiving love becomes real for us only through our willingness to forgive others. When he taught us the Lord's Prayer, there is a petition for forgiveness. Indeed it is the only petition which is elaborated upon within the prayer itself...saying if you forgive others they you will be able to experience God's forgiveness ~~with~~

Then, on the cross, Jesus gives us the supreme example of what he was talking about in his teachings. First, he expresses the anguish of Gethsemane: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then we hear him say: "Father, forgive them". It is as though the whole crucifixion event revolves around that turning point because, with his next words, Jesus is able to give himself to God unconditionally: "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". In his willingness to forgive, Jesus' gift of self to God - and to us - is complete.

An American woman was taking an auto tour of the Italian countryside. As she was driving along, enjoying the scenery, she saw that there had been a collision between 2 cars, each loaded with a family for countryside picnics. No one was hurt. The men, with arms flailing and fists clenched, were standing around the cars arguing about which one was at fault. The women were in the field next to the road. They had placed their family picnics side by side and were busy spreading out the food for a common buffet.

In today's gospel, Luke tells us that Jesus had been invited to share a meal with a rich pharisee. As he sat at the table in the pharisee's house, a woman, a notorious sinner, entered. She brought with her a flask of ointment, "and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed him with ointment".

The pharisee, said to himself: "if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman was touching him for she is a sinner". Jesus knew what the pharisee was thinking and said to him: "Simon, I have something to say to you... a certain creditor had two debtors; one owed him five hundred denari, the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered "The one, I suppose, whom he forgave more" To which Jesus replied, "You have judged rightly...do you see this

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woman? I entered your house, you gave me not water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss but from the time she came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little

The person who loves much is a forgiving person. The person who forgives much is a forgiven person. Forgiveness is like a circle of mercy - not a vicious circle, but a gracious circle. We cannot experience God's forgiveness unless we are willing to forgive. At the same time, our willingness to forgive flows from the experience of God's forgiving nature.

In a book called THE COURAGE TO LOVE, there is a story of an old man in India who sat down in the shade of a big tree, the roots of which extended far into the swamp. The old man notices a disturbance where the roots disappeared into the water. It seems that a scorpion had become hopelessly entangled in the roots. The old man rose and tread carefully along the roots until he reached the place where the scorpion was trapped. He reached down to try to pull it free. but each time he touched the scorpion it struck him with its tail painfully stinging his hand. After several tries the old man's hand was so swollen that he could no longer close his fingers and he went back to the shade to wait for the swelling to subside. As he sat down

he saw a young man standing nearby, laughing at him. "YOU're a fool", said the young man, "wasting your time to help a scorpion that can only do you harm". The old man replied: "simply because it is in the nature of a scorpion to sting, should I change my nature...which is to save?"

A great theologian has said that "forgiveness is the ~~sy~~ central issue of theology". To which we can add "forgiveness is the central issue of Christian living. To forget a wrong is a wonderful revenge. But the noblest revenge is to forgive.

One time a woman set out to buy a silver soup-ladle. The salesman at the silversmith was obliging. He showed her many ladles. Some were very fancy, gilded pieces with embossed handles and designs. She wouldn't decide. The salesman said: "perhaps you would care to look at something like this" as he brought a ladle that was simple and unadorned. This one pleased the woman very much. She wanted to buy it. But the price was nearly double the cost of any of the rest. She asked why and the salesman said: "You see, in fancy, ornamental ware the flaws of the material do not show. The defects are covered up by the ornamentation. As you can see, this plain ladle is free of defects. If there were any, you would see them easily. It is as simple as that".

It's as simple as that. When you strip away all the fancy words about what it means to be a genuine disciple of Jesus,

It all comes down to whether or not you are a loving, caring, forgiving person. No amount of ornamentation...no amount of fancy words can cover that up.