

FORGIVING AND FORGIVEN
Communion Meditation –8:30 a.m. Service—March 4, 2012 –Colossians 3: 12-17
The Church of the Covenant

I realize that these Bible verses are often used to remind ourselves of the reciprocal nature of our forgiveness in Jesus Christ. That is, if we really feel forgiven by what Jesus Christ has done for us through His cross, His death and His blood, then we can be forgiving with others in our lives. We can let go of our need to hold grudges, to feel a lack of forgiveness, and to let go of all un-forgiveness in our life. In other words, if we really are fully forgiven by Calvary then a clear sign of that forgiveness is our ability to fully forgive others in Jesus' name. We can be forgiving...because we are forgiven...

But I am taking a slightly different tack on this scripture for today. I am also saying that if Jesus' forgiveness has indeed fully forgiven us then we can also fully forgive ourselves. We may be our own sternest critic and while it may be easier to forgive someone else, it may be hardest actually to forgive ourselves. Let me use a very specific instance. Our dear friend and brother, Randy Boyer, passed away. When a loved one passes away a very normal reaction to that death is a feeling of guilt –I wish I had done more. I wish I had written a note. I wish I had visited. I wish I had prayed more. I wish I had spent more time with Randy getting to know him better. I wish...I wish...I wish... Our hearts become filled with regret and a certain sense of unforgiveness drifts in to claim our heart. When someone we love dies that is the normal human reaction –we feel guilty. And if we sent one note to him we feel we should have sent two. If we visited him two times we feel we should have visited him four times. If we had four good conversations with him over the past three years then we feel we should have had eight good conversations with him. If we prayed for him eight times then we feel we should have prayed for him 16 times. If we thought of him 16 times then we feel we ought to have thought of him 32 times and so forth and so on, until in addition to our feelings of loss we compound it with our feelings of guilt. When you love someone and they pass away that's what happens.

So are we able to forgive ourselves today? Are we able to rest in what Christ has done for us on the cross and really believe and accept our full forgiveness and be able to move away from "guilting ourselves up" and in ways that our dear friend Randy would never want us to do?

As a matter of fact, here's the truth of it –as a congregation we did more and better than anyone ever could have expected or believed or hoped or dreamed. We visited. We prayed. We raked leaves. We brought food. We held healing services. We held onto the unwavering hope that indeed through the mercies of God our dear friend and brother could and would be healed. We visited so much that there were traffic jams on Marion Drive in McMurray at the Boyer residence. We visited so much you had to take a number outside of Randy's room in the hospital. We visited so much we wore out Becky and the family. We brought in so much food that sometimes there wasn't room in the refrigerator, that it took people to coordinate the food from not just one church, but from three churches, that they had more food than might be possible even to consume. We prayed a lot. I remember Randy sharing with me that when he was in intensive care in December and thought he was going to pass away then that he had a mental picture of a giant safety net; he was falling down into death, but that there was a giant safety net that kept him from falling and he said that the net was the prayers of the people of The Church of the Covenant. How many times did our prayers bring him back? He lived 18 years with a cancer that claims people in two. He was the longest survivor in the nation on the last chemo drug he took. You think prayer didn't sustain him? You think that wasn't a miracle? And finally, after he had made peace with God our prayers held him here until finally he requested that we no longer pray for healing, but that we pray for peace and rest and a painless passing into eternity for him. We prayed so

much that he finally asked, please pray no more. That's how much we prayed. The last healing service he conducted in November was powerful; but its power was that he was anointed not so much to be healed but to go into glory. There is anointing with oil for healing, and an anointing for service, and an anointing for passing into eternity; and Randy, I believe, was anointed in that last healing service as a prelude to his going into heaven. It was his last official service with us. And yet also at his funeral service last Saturday, I was not the only person who observed that he was in the Chapel at the very place we had prayed for his healing. See, **I believe that HEAVEN is indeed the healing of death itself.** Don't you believe that? I do. No congregation could have loved more, prayed more, raked leaves more, brought in more food, cared more, been more compassionate, giving, and loving that The Church of the Covenant has been. I have served many churches over the years; but you have loved more than all those other churches put together...It is who you are; it is what Randy called forth from you; it is who the love of God has created you to be...It isn't because we did anything wrong that Randy passed away, no, beloved, we did everything right...and it was just time for the Lord in His mercy to bring Randy home and to finally heal him and answer our prayers...

There is one more person we need to forgive...and that is God Himself. It would be easy to blame the Lord for our feelings of loss and pain. God, why did you take him? Why was there so much prayer but you didn't do what we wanted you to do and heal him?

The cross allows us to be FORGIVING AND FORGIVEN...to be personally forgiven...to be able to forgive ourselves in our own life...but also to be able to forgive God and to be able to see all the mercy and grace we have received...even and especially through this hard and difficult time...

The message is this --Forgive others...forgive yourself....forgive God... As our scripture says: *"as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive..." (Colossians 3: 13)* Forgive others; forgive yourself; forgive God and you will know the peace God wants us to have in our heart because of the love of Jesus on the cross.

Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*