

Ordinary 24A - 2026

Forgiveness Written in Stone

A story is told of two friends who were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand, "Today my best friends slapped me in the face." They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from nearly drowning, he wrote on a stone, "Today my best friend saved my life." His friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?" The other friend replied "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it." So real forgiveness keeps on leaving the sins of others and our hurts in the past. Yet Jesus understands the difficulty of such forgiveness. To keep on forgiving is a God-like characteristic. It is contrary to human nature. So He gives a parable beginning in v.23 which will help us obey His commandment to keep on forgiving. (by Stephen Felker from *How Often Should I Forgive?*)

"Perhaps, you would prefer, after all, to take the money?"

There is a story about a judge in a middle-eastern country who was trying to resolve a difficult case. The wife of a deceased man was asking for the death sentence to be imposed upon the man who had killed her husband. It seems that while he was in a tree gathering dates, the man had fallen upon the woman's husband and fatally injured him. "*Was the fall intentional?*" the judge inquired. "*Were these men enemies?*" "No," the woman replied. "*Even so,*" she said, "*I want my revenge.*" Despite the judge's repeated attempts to dissuade her, the widow demanded the blood price to which the law entitled her. The judge even suggested that a sum of money would serve her better than vengeance. No dice. "*It is your right to seek compensation,*" the judge finally declared, "*and it is your right to ask for this man's life. And it is my right,*" he continued, "*to decree how he shall die. And so,*" the judge declared, "*you shall take this man with you immediately. He shall be tied to the foot of a palm tree; and you shall climb to the top of the tree and throw yourself down upon him from a great height. In this way you will take his life as he took your husband's.*" Only silence met the judge's decree. Then the judge spoke: "*Perhaps,*" he said, "*you would prefer after all to take the money?*" She did. (<http://www.dbcity.com/churches/res/01-08-06.htm>).

Forgiven sinners

"In heaven, there are only forgiven sinners. There are no good guys, no upright, successful types who, by dint of their own integrity, have been accepted into the great country club in the sky. There are only failures, only those who have accepted their deaths in their sins and who have been raised up by the King who himself died that they might live. "But in hell, too, there are only forgiven sinners. Jesus on the cross does not sort out certain exceptionally recalcitrant parties and cut them off from the pardon of his death. He forgives the badness of even the worst of us, willy-nilly; and he never takes back that forgiveness, not even at the bottom of the bottomless pit. "The sole difference, therefore, between heaven and hell is that in heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along, while in hell it is rejected and blocked. In heaven, the death of the king is welcomed and becomes the doorway to new life in the resurrection. In hell, the old life of the bookkeeping world is insisted on and becomes, forever, the pointless torture it always was. "There is only one unpardonable sin, and that is to withhold pardon from others. The only thing that can keep us out of the joy of the resurrection is to join the unforgiving servant in his refusal to die." - Robert Capon

Henri Nouwen's *With Open Hands* led me to tell a children's story.

We talk about the feeling of being hurt, of not being able to forgive, of that "broken loop" in our head that goes over and over the injustice/wrong/hurt.... and talk about how we "hang on" to that. So we all think of something that has happened to us that we still "hang on to" (the whole congregation does this). and we close one hand tightly to hang on to it. Then we think of another thing, and close the other hand. Then, i bring out a beautifully wrapped present or a baby doll or a loaf of bread that I break or a communion wafer.... and tell them that God has this beautiful gift to give us, but how can we accept it with hands clenched?

We just have to be able to open our hands and set down the hurt/injustice/anger so that we can accept the gift that is always there for us.... And then sometimes in worship we pray with open hands, to remind ourselves.