

## **St Stephen's 10:30am 19th Apr 2015 Allan Blyth**

**Theme: "Forgiveness" Key Text: Luke 24: 47**

**Scriptures** Acts 3:12-20; Ps 4, 1 Jn 2:15-17, 3:1-6; Lk 24:36b-48

Can you imagine all work places stable and encouraging, all couples true to their marriage vows, all states and nations coexisting in peace?

A common theme from today's scriptures could make such a dream reality – "Forgiveness"

Reality is very different for many.

Here today would there be anyone not familiar with the anguish and pain of relationship breakdown? A former employee or boss you really don't want to run into, grandchildren you worry for as parents sink into conflict, a loved one estranged, a former church member who now goes elsewhere, or nowhere, because of some unresolved upset?

The emotional cost is enormous. So too, the dollar cost. A 2014 study<sup>1</sup> shows that divorce alone costs Australian taxpayers \$14 billion annually, i.e. \$1100/ taxpayer/year. And the cost of nations at war?

Psychologist Raymond Richmond writes<sup>2</sup>: Anyone who has ever been victimised—and that includes survivors of crime, accidents, childhood abuse, political imprisonment, warfare, and so on—must decide whether or not to forgive the perpetrator. There is no middle ground: you either forgive the person who hurt you, or you hold on to bitterness and anger. Holding on to bitterness and anger can cause further problems. For the victimised, being able to forgive your victimiser, is crucial to healing.

The Bible teaches, "Confess your sins to one another so that you may be healed." James 5:16

Jesus taught, "Forgive those who have sinned against you. Only then can you be forgiven." Mt 6:14, 15

The sin syndrome – imperfect behaviour, whether visible, like stealing, adultery and murder, or invisible, like hatred, greed, revenge or indifference – is universal. Everyone sins. All are guilty. Cf Rom 3:23

Interestingly virtually every religion has practices to deal with sin and restore wholeness and peace e.g. the many water festivals for purification.<sup>3</sup> And offerings. In Bali offerings are placed on streets and footpaths daily, throughout Thailand you will see the "spirit houses" freshly supplied with food and flowers. At the great feast of Islam at Mecca 100 million plus animals are slaughtered annually in 48 hours.

Concerning OT times: The writer to the Hebrews in the NT wrote, "Every Jewish priest performs his services every day and offers the same sacrifices many times; but these sacrifices can never take away sins." And then concerning the present time he wrote: "Christ, however, offered one sacrifice for sins, an offering that is effective for ever." See Heb 10:11-14

This is a very big difference between Christianity and all other religions. One sufficient sacrifice for all sins. Jesus' death on the cross was that sacrifice. With forgiveness every debt, every trespass is cancelled, God obliterates the record. No-one can condemn. Forgiveness is giving up the right to recompense, to what would be just. Goodness, even recompense may be inspired, but it is not demanded.

No wonder Jesus said, *"...repentance and the (God's) forgiveness of sins must be preached to all..."* Lk 24:47

While living in Thailand our office administrator, Thai and nominally Buddhist, grew very interested in the person and life of Jesus Christ. On grasping that nothing could be done to earn or deserve God's forgiveness, he responded, "It's not fair. I have to do something." Well yes, he did, simply to repent, ie turn to God and accept His gift of forgiveness, the robe of righteousness<sup>4</sup> that enables Jesus to present those who are His, faultless before the presence of His glory. Sadly, at that time our Thai friend couldn't.

This message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, Jesus commands his disciples to take to all nations.

A repentant heart receiving forgiveness extends forgiveness to others. I think God understands that forgiveness is not easy. Jesus told a story in Matthew 18 of a servant who owed a king millions of pounds. He and his family were about to be sold as slaves to pay the debt. The servant cried to the king for mercy. The king cancelled the debt. A little later that

forgiven servant refused to have any mercy at all on a fellow servant who owed him a very small amount and had him thrown into prison. On hearing of what his forgiven servant had done, the King responded, “I cancelled your entire debt just because you appealed to me. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?”

And so the King handed him over to the jailers.

Seeking forgiveness and forgiving others are fundamental to a relationship with the King of kings!

It is not easy. But it can be done.

Mary Johnson lost her son in 1993 after a then-teenaged Oshea Israel got into a fight with him at a party, and shot him<sup>5</sup>. With much unanswered<sup>12</sup> yrs on, Johnson went to visit Oshea in jail. After their first contact she reported, “I began to feel this movement in my feet. It moved up my legs, and it just moved up my body. When I felt it leave me, I instantly knew that all that anger & hatred and animosity I had in my heart for you for twelve years was over. I had totally forgiven you.” The two now live as neighbours in a duplex. In interviews, Johnson has even referred to Israel as “son”. Speaking to Mary, Israel said, “I admire you for being brave enough to offer forgiveness, and for being brave enough to take that step. It motivates me to stay on the right path.”

Forgiveness, God’s gift for all, through Jesus. Have you admitted your need and accepted the gift and the promised refreshing<sup>6</sup> to extend forgiveness to others. The Hymn “Come as You Are”, invites us to turn to God, coming as we are, trusting Jesus, right now.

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1. Lauren Wilson and Lisa Cornish, *The Australian* 6 July 2014

2. “A Guide to Psychology and its Practice” Raymond Lloyd Richmond ©1997-2015

3. e.g. Songkran & Loi Krathong, Thailand; Kumbh Mela, Hindu Festival, Dai minority China

4. Isaiah 61:10, Rev 21:2, Jude 24,25, Rom 8.1

5. *The Daily Beast* “You killed my Son ... and I forgive You” True Stories 23.10.’13

6. Acts 3.19-20