

Dear Friends,

A member wrote to me concerning last Sunday's sermon that I maybe was a little heavy-handed around forgiveness. Here is my response(edited):

In the space of one sermon, it is hard to paint a whole picture. Most of the time, I only draw stick figures with maybe some splash of color. In some evangelical churches, I have heard it is a fairly common practice to bring up the victim of abuse in front of the congregation and church leaders so they might forgive the abuser and the survivor is victimized again. That is not what I was trying to get across. Just like all things in our world, forgiveness is a process and it takes time. If I am to forgive then I must have the agency to do it on my terms and not because others say when and how I should do it. If there was a relationship, in a family, community, or church before the abuse, then it may be possible to reconcile if the abuser is repentant and changes their ways. If the abuser will not change or acknowledge their abuse, then it is probably best for all for no more contact. If it is strangers, then it might not be necessary to meet again.

Forgiveness can be letting go of the anger and hurt so that we may heal from the trauma. It isn't so the other person gets to walk free with no consequences, but as Nancy Giguere and I learned through Restorative Justice training, there is more than one way to bring this about. Forgiveness, like love, is the goal. How we get there and what it looks like will be pretty different for each situation.

I was focusing on (or trying to) Christian nationalists and how to go forward in our country. Lots of stuff I left out because the sermon was already too long, but I believe they are basically brainwashed/brain-patterned into a certain world view that being white and Christian is the gold standard in this world and this view is unlikely to change. If our country is to go forward, how do we do this without going to war? We need to hold the violent offenders accountable and we need to hold the leaders and media who promote this accountable. And we need to find a way to bring these followers back into the wider fold of our society and Christianity. It does seem impossible, and it will take a very long time, but I think there is hope.

There is also a Jewish tradition that says if the abuser asks for forgiveness three times (hopefully sincere) and the survivor won't grant it, the sin then falls onto the survivor. Forgiveness was shown on the cross and we as individuals, societies, religions, and nations need to move towards it if the human race is to survive. On my reading list is a book called, "Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace" by Miroslav Volf. I should maybe put that higher on it.

Peace
Pastor Enno