



on Sermon 17th September ‘Pay-back Jesus Way’ Exodus 14:19-31 Mt 18:21-35

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be .. Amen ^{off}

^{1*} Paulo Freire, 20th century said: "We make the road by walking." **We make the road by walking...** I haven't been able to forget this quote as I reflected on the scriptures and theme for today. I know I keep saying that our receiving of the scriptures is / has many levels / layers and today *again* for them to speak to us, I believe we must dig deep into them and examine them in today's light – for today's people – us!

One of the strongest metaphors for the Christian life is that it is a journey. We walk in faith following Jesus. I think we identify closely with this in part because Jesus and his disciples spent so much time on the road... ^{on} and today I think we've a good reminder that when our faith ancestors escaped Egypt and spent 40+ years '*on the road*' – they were forever changed / their faith was forever changed / the world was in fact changed forever. The Hebrew people became the nation of Israel, as they walked away from slavery and into the promises of YHWH God. ^{off}



And in the middle of this is the sound of a truth in Paulo's words – **we make the road by walking...** If we do not walk in faith – **by** faith there is no path???.... For anyone... ever...

The Hebrew people learnt as they walked the road into the promise of God for a land to call home. **Jesus** teaching is a *little* different but, I believe the teaching from him today is that as Kingdom people we must walk in heart-driven-forgiveness *daily/ hourly/ minute by minute*. **And wait** – there is more. Not only **must** we walk, but if we chose the '*other* path', as in we chose not to walk forgiveness, that path leads to torment, is torture. And that is not Jesus way. Pay-back for debt/hurt, etc., is not achieved by repeating the cycle, or doing unto others what was done to you. **It's** achieved by faith walking, heart driven forgiveness.

You see one of the struggles with the Moses – the Hebrew's escape from Egypt is the celebration of the people over the death / collapse / destruction of the pursuing Egyptian army. ^{on} **Remember we** are following the story of the people of God from Abraham... Jacob ... Joseph... Moses. Under Moses with God the Egyptian Pharaoh let the slaves go. We've missed the gory details of the plagues and horrific experiences behind the Passover, **today** for us, the people are in full flight. ^{off}



BUT they have arrived in their flight an "escape" **dead-end** – the shores of the ^{2*}Red / reed sea. If their Pharaoh was Ramses II^{4*} he had one of / had the **best** armies in the world. He was a fantastic Temple builder and very successful military conqueror. *Whoever* Pharaoh was, the Hebrew people knew they were no match for an army! And **as they walked** the path appeared before them... ^{on} This is the stuff of faith, of mystery and miracle; it is our inheritance – but a word of caution for us today.



This is one place Jesus teaching parable today impacts how we live with this history. The Hebrew people of God convinced now, that God was with them **and** Moses was God inspired because of the escape, destruction, survival... **and** the fact of the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night... The people rejoiced in the death of their enemies, in the vengeance / revenge... of their enemies because the ones who had hurt them, abused them, killed, tormented... were now dead... **and** Jesus says-in his teaching parable today: "*actually repeating a cycle of violence is wrong, continuing a cycle of violence is torture...* The path to health, to life, is by mercy walking in forgiveness. ^{off}

So, "Rather than adopt a Mosaic attitude of violence and judgement against enemies, and a celebration of their demise, Jesus invites us to a different response to those who hurt us – the response of forgiveness and relinquishing of judgement, and of ending the cycle of violence and retribution and choosing to actively seek peace through the tough, but healing act of forgiveness." ^{5*}

This teaching parable of Jesus is only found in Matthew^{6*} and it is the second – or follow up teaching concerning how we are to forgive. Mt 18:15-20 is about what to do with one sin against another

1* From K Matthews; 2* H Wallace; 4* H Wallace for 27Aug17 Sm; 5* Sacridise; 6* J Petty;

person. So we are told that we are to go to that person and discuss the matter between the two of you; if that doesn't work, take witnesses; if that doesn't work and the 'other' refuses to listen to the church, he may then be regarded "as a gentile and a tax collector."

This week the teaching ^{6*} moves the discussion from the recalcitrant sinner--the one who won't admit he was wrong--to the sinner who keeps repeating sins. Peter, the leader of the disciples, steps up and asks: "OK, that's how we handle cranky old Uncle Edgar. What about the one who keeps on sinning?"

Because we don't have the kind of knowledge Jesus listeners had – some background is needed to fully grab a hold of what they are saying. Peter asks if the number of times forgiveness must be offered is up to 7 times – their rule in law. ^{on} If he were answering today Jesus might have said: *No – not 7 – infinity is the number of times you must forgive.*



The background to the discussion between Peter and Jesus is that in Genesis 4:23-24 there is a character called Lamech who calls for vengeance 70x7. Peter and his listeners would have known this – so when Jesus said – 'no 70 x7', they knew Jesus was ^{6*} **reversing** the call for vengeance. To Peter and co. this meant Jesus call was for unlimited forgiveness. Then if we add in the meaning of specifically using '7', the unlimited gets even bigger!!! The number of completion was / is 7, so when multiplied by itself, it gets 'bigger' and that is further intensified by multiplying '7' by ten! We are to think "beyond infinity".

Why unlimited – infinity forgiveness? ^{off} Well Jesus says... It's like a human king who wanted to settle up his accounts; he is a book keeper – the scholar Robert Capon ^{6*} "says the king is one who will have high regard for the upright and the solvent, "but for anyone in real trouble, he will have no care at all except to get his money back as best he can. The bookkeeping heresy (R Capon), "more broadly applied, is an attempt at self-justification, as if to say: Here's all the reasons I'm a swell person: member of the church council, sing in the choir, pay my bills, and hold out a stray dollar bill every now and then when passing a beggar on the street. It assumes justice, i.e. that we get what we deserve.

The point of nearly all the parables is that this is not God's way of doing things. God throws all those account books right out the window on the basis of the death and resurrection of his son. God deals with the world through grace and mercy and not through justice--not through what we deserve,...” So Jesus has this slave owe his lord a huge sum, ten thousand talents. A talent was the largest single unit of that time, and 10,000 the largest number used to count. The King demands repayment, the slave begs... and the King, shifts, turns, repents. He tosses one worldview out the window and takes up another one--not accounts and justice this time, but grace and compassion instead. He "forgave the debt (*apheken*)."



But the slave is locked into the old way of thinking / acting / walking... And Jesus parable points out – this old way easily erupts into violence. ^{on} When the slave discovers a fellow-slave who owes him money, he seizes his fellow slave, starts choking him, and demands payment. The other fellow-slaves become whistle blowers and the King is outraged. "Wicked slave," he says, called "wicked" not because he lost money but because he wouldn't forgive. "I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave **just as I had mercy on you?**" ^{off}

Not "moved with compassion" now, but "moved with anger," the king tossed the unforgiving servant to "the tormentors." "And this my Father in heaven will do to each of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart," says Jesus. ^{6*} "if we / when we are unforgiving, we buy into the same worldview as the bookkeeping heresy: What matters are the accounts. We may need violence to protect them. If that's the way we continue to go, which we usually do, we will continue to be "tormented.""

^{on} There is, a better way, **which is forgiveness, grace, mercy, compassion, and peace.** This is how God works and what Jesus teaches forthrightly, directly, and, on every occasion, unequivocally. When it comes to forgiveness, there is never a loophole and never an option. It is always: you must forgive.

This is not a matter of going through the motions, asking the 'other' to read your lips', it has to come from your heart. Pay-back Jesus way, is a road we make choosing to walk in forgiveness. Amen ^{off}

