

LENTEN REFLECTIONS 2019



Reflections on Returning to God

The final phrase in the passage of Isaiah 55:6-7 is what particularly struck me about this reading. In the NRSV translation it reads “let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” However, being a bit of a bible nerd, I always find it helpful to learn a bit more by comparing translations.

In The Message it’s translated as: *‘Come back to our God, who is lavish with forgiveness.’*

In the International Children’s Bible: *‘They should come to our God, because he will freely forgive them.’*

In the NIRV: *‘Let them turn to our God. He is always ready to forgive.’*

In the NIV: *‘Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon’*

Lastly, in The Voice: *‘God will excuse our past wrongs. Our God’s forgiveness is inexhaustible.’*

Reading these statements of forgiveness are powerful enough before we even put them into the context of the larger scripture passage. If we look to the previous statement in this piece of scripture it reads: ‘let the wicked forsake their ways.’

To me this is very intentional language, the term wicked paint’s a strong picture in my imagination. It paints the picture of someone clouded in darkness who is not only making bad choices but is completely consumed by their sin. When I am confessing my sins in church using the language of the BCP I often find that asking forgiveness for my ‘manifold wickedness’ seems a bit too strong. Am I wicked? Yes I make mistakes but wickedness seems a bit of an overstatement, doesn’t it? What I have come to terms with is that nothing can separate us from God, No selfishness, no moral ineptitudes, no mistake, no passivity can separate us from that endless love.

However, don’t take these statements as naiveté, I do believe there is wickedness in our world we see it in the news every day. There are people who are truly wicked and whose life circumstances, childhoods, choices, addictions or radical worldviews have caused them to be clouded in the darkness. But still even those who are ‘wicked’ are still given the freedom of choice to find that ‘inexhaustible forgiveness’ to be ‘freely pardoned’ to come to the God that is ‘always ready to forgive’ ‘who is lavish with forgiveness’ and who ‘abundantly pardons’ what a radical, unpredictable, countercultural love this is we have to offer the world!

Leslie Flynn

Reflections on Transformation

It is interesting to note that transformation is used in many areas of our daily life such as chemistry, physics, business, and computer sciences in addition to recognizing a profound spiritual change. While Lent is a period of reflection and prayer as we prepare for Easter it can also be time of personal transformation. It may not be the intense spiritual change experienced by Jesus on the mountain and by Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, but I think that there are there are meaningful transformations that often happen to us. The simple act of thanking someone for a favour or just smiling to a stranger can provoke a change in one's life. Some time ago walking down a busy city street I passed a man sitting on the curb asking for change. Like the priest in the Good Samaritan parable I ignored him until after several more steps something stopped me & I turned, returned, and gave him some money. His gratitude and my own feeling of having helped someone less fortunate was, I believe, a transformation. So, in this season of Lent may we all look for transformational acts”.

Ray

LENTEN REFLECTION TRANSFORMATION (LUKE 9:28-29)

“Now, about eight days after these sayings, Jesus took with him, Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white.” **Luke 9:28-29.**

Transformation! It all began at creation when the Lord created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. **Genesis 1.** God transformed nothingness into a beautiful world, both terrestrial and celestial and the beauty called “nature” surpasses all, ever made by humankind.

God created the earth, beautiful mountains, seas, rivers and lakes, heavenly bodies, flora and fauna and it is a feat of **transformation** which cannot be replicated. He then created mankind whom he equipped with visible and tangible characteristics and an intangible mind which gives us the ability to assist in making our environment orderly, to care for, love and educate each other.

We have been endowed with gifts which are legion and as a result, we see the results of those gifts. For example, many members of our church family have used their gifts to transform our surroundings, beautify our church, and prepare food and to show kindness to others.

The birth of a child or any living thing is a wonderment of transformation. Watching an egg turn into a caterpillar, then a cocoon, and ultimately the emergence of a beautiful butterfly, (metamorphosis) may be witnessed in each stage. Modern technology has allowed us to

witness each stage of the growth of a seed to its final state, like the opening of a flower. That is transformation in action; transformation is the journey of life.

The power of the seas and bodies of fresh water, transforms our landscapes into works of beauty. The flash of lightning followed by a clap of thunder is said to be the transformation of the voice of God. Moses, on his way down from Mount Sinai having received the tablet with the 10 Commandments, was transformed. His face was dazzling. Exodus 19. Moses too heard the voice of God.

Look skyward and watch the transformation of clouds, awesome! The eclipse of the sun or the moon is a sight to behold. In every instance, transformation may be traced back to a Godly event. The ability or the power associated with transformation comes from God.

The face of humankind is like a canvass on which we show our emotions, joy, happiness, love, sadness, surprise, reverence and fear. These are characteristics of transformation. The powers of transformation are endless.

In closing, we are created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27. If we look at ourselves in a mirror, look into our eyes, we will see the face of God. This is the pinnacle of transformation. Every one of us resembles the face of God.

Genevieve Richards

TRANSFORMATION

Really Dad? Thirteen people to serve Passover dinner tonight? What does Dad mean, he met them out on the street today and he just had to say yes to prepare the Passover for them?

I am SO disappointed; don't want them to come or serve them dinner – or be anywhere close to them tonight.

Well, the room is set up, the table prepared, the food ready. Where are these folks?

Good heaven's, he's the fellow we went to listen to a little while ago.

His eyes are haunting me. I have never seen such eyes. Every time I bring more food he looks at me - straight into my eyes. Something inside me tells me to acknowledge his eyes, but can I?

Boy, he is talking a lot tonight. Now they all seem to be listening to him – suddenly everybody is quiet. What did he just say while he broke off that piece of bread? “This is my body – eat it in memory of me”. What? Eat his body? Oh, he means every time one of them eats a piece of bread, they should remember him.

Well, time to check whether they have enough wine – what’s he saying now: “drink this in memory of me.” Is this a farewell dinner?

Well, they are getting ready to leave now. What Mom? The young Rabbi wants to talk to me? Me, a young servant girl? I hope I am not in trouble – did he know that I was listening in and saw him sharing bread and wine with his friends?

I didn’t expect THIS. A personal thank you from him! He mentioned that he was indeed leaving for the Mount of Olives to pray with his friends and tomorrow he was off to see his Father, but that he had to go on this journey alone. So he WAS saying good-bye to his friends. I said that next time he was coming to Jerusalem, he should send a message to my dad and we could prepare a dinner for him and his friends again. I like this man!

I won’t ever forget his eyes – they looked right through me – it’s like he saw me, everything about me. He sees all of me. Is this why he came here tonight?

He thanked ME.

Now I see.

Susanne Reul-Zastre

Reflections on Forgiveness

Jesus emphasized forgiveness when he taught his disciples to pray: “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” He linked the capacity to receive forgiveness to our capacity to forgive. His sacrifice was the greatest act of mercy and forgiveness the world will ever know but unless we open our hearts and offer forgiveness, we cannot be forgiven.

Very early in my life a wise woman told me that our relationship with God is impaired every time we choose to burden ourselves with anger and resentment, which can be focused either inwards or outwards. In my experience, constantly carrying this weight makes it very hard to find the joy in life that is offered to us through God’s love. The weight can be lifted if we nurture a place in our heart that will allow us to forgive.

What is forgiveness? It can be seen as the ending of resentment or anger over an actual or perceived offense. It can be viewed as the way to restore a broken relationship, as with the prodigal son. But essentially, forgiveness is born when we try to love as God loves, mercifully and unconditionally. The **foundation of forgiveness is love** but it is deeply rooted in mercy.

What is mercy? It is to offer relief from misery, in all its forms. God offers us total and complete forgiveness of our sins through his mercy. This mercy frees us to strive constantly to improve our life choices. God asks us to love others the way he has loved us, to emulate his mercy, and to be willing to forgive. He invites us to restore our relationships through mercy,

kindness, and forgiveness. If we stumble in our quest, God's mercy allows us to acknowledge our failings, learn from them, and constantly try to do better.

I am sure God knows that mercy and forgiveness are very difficult for us. He knows that courage is required for us to offer mercy where it seems to be undeserved. He knows that strength is needed to let go of pain and hurt. I believe that he knows these things because he paid the highest possible price for our sins by sending his son to live among us, and then to suffer and die. He did this so we might learn the value of kindness and mercy through Jesus' life and teachings and, ultimately, that we might learn about forgiveness... "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

God will always wait for us. I know I will stumble but I believe that I can always restore my relationship with him, using some pretty powerful tools - mercy, kindness, and forgiveness.

"If you forgive people their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive people their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-18)

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

Sharon McMillan

Forgiveness (Luke 15: 20 – 24)

This reflection is based on the story of the "Prodigal Son. It is a parable about family, love, jealousy and **the power of forgiveness**.

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude, regarding an offense; lets go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, forswears recompense from punishment of the offender, however legally or morally justified it might be and with an increased ability to wish the offender well.

Wikipedia.

Like many young adults, the prodigal son left his comfortable home to pursue his future with good intentions. Leaving home is never easy; I am sure that many of us have faced that situation at one time or another. Unfortunately, he fell on hard times. He was reduced to being hungry and homeless. He realized that he would have to swallow his pride and return home.

"So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion, he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" ". "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. Luke 15:20-24.

We like the family of the prodigal son have our moments when we have disappointments and conflict. It may be within the family or it may be someone who has hurt us; we may feel betrayed or the reverse may also be true.

Sometimes, our pride feels wounded and we want to be removed from the situation or we feel that we have nothing more to say to the other person. However, what is there to be gained from holding a grudge? How are we justified in refusing to forgive others when we ourselves are imperfect? Sometimes we cause hurt in retaliation or sometimes we cause hurt unwittingly. Yet, Jesus died on the cross for us all and when the ultimate hurt was perpetrated against him, he said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". Luke 23: 34.

Jesus forgave others time and time again. There are instances when he forgave his friends and those who sought to do him harm. Simon Peter, one of his Apostles, denied knowing Jesus three times at the time he was arrested before his trial and crucifixion, John 18: 13 – 27.

Scripture tells us of the story of Joseph son of Jacob and Rachel. He was the youngest of 12. Because of Jealousy, his brothers plotted to harm him, so they threw him in a dry well and then sold him to a stranger. Many years later, Joseph came face to face with his brothers and despite all, he forgave them for what they did to him and welcomed them with open arms. Genesis 50:15-21.

Another Old Testament story about forgiveness centres on the stormy relationship between King Saul and David. King Saul wanted to destroy David yet, David forgave King Saul and when David became king, he in turn showed love and kindness to King Saul's son Jonathan. 1st Samuel.

There is the story of the woman who was found guilty of adultery by the spiritual leaders and was sentenced to death by stoning. The leaders took her to Jesus expecting him to condemn her and condone the act of stoning her. Instead, Jesus forgave her and said to her "Go and sin no more". John 8:11.

We are not perfect and there are times when we will err. Just as Jesus died on the cross to forgive us our sins, it is fitting that we strive to forgive others in the spirit of kindness and love.

Forgive our Sins As We Forgive

Forgive our sins as you forgive,

You taught us Lord to pray;

But you alone can grant us grace

To live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless

The unforgiving heart

That broods on wrongs,

And will not let old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals

The truth we dimly knew;

What trivial debts are owed to us,

How great our debts to you!

Lord cleanse the depths within our souls

And bid resentment cease;

Then bound us all in bonds of love,

Our lives will spread your peace.

Rosamund Eleanor Herklots

(1905-1987)

Genevieve E.A. Richards

Forgiveness

I married way too young against my parent's wishes and as they had thought all along – it did not work out. I was married in an old Anglican church along the Pilgrim's Way with all the trappings and I said my vows honestly and sincerely – really meaning it. The marriage only lasted 18 months and my parents welcomed me back home , never once saying “I told you so”! True forgiveness. My father even helped me to emigrate to Canada to start a new life (although they really did not want me to go so far away.) But I had not forgiven myself and going to church was the last thing on my mind as I truly believed I had sinned and God would be angry with me (an old testament upbringing!) I moved from Toronto to Vancouver and tried again to start a new life with teaching in a new school. All this time I did not feel I could go to church. In

Vancouver I met my second husband, we were married and after a year in Peru moved back to Victoria – close to St. Luke's. Seeing the little church on the corner reminded me of the one in England and so finally I went back. The moment I entered St. Luke's I felt the forgiveness and a deep relief at being part of a friendly congregation. I wish I had forgiven myself long ago because now I know that God forgave me right from the start.

Submitted by Gillian Bloom

Lenten Reflection

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us”

Jesus taught us these words, and as part of the Lord's Prayer they are said often. But how often do we really consider what they mean? Repentance and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin, but they are two separate notions, each with its own set of challenges.

“Forgive us our trespasses”, the first part of the quotation, is so easy to say, but it's not as easy as just saying the words. We know God is all merciful, but still there is no absolution unless we take some responsibility, unless there is some repentance on our part. What shape does this repentance take? First, we have to acknowledge that we have done wrong, but that acknowledgement can only come from an awareness of wrongdoing and, alas, so many of us are blind to our faults. If we are not aware of our fault, can there be wrongdoing? I'm afraid so. As they say, ignorance of the law is no excuse. There are broad categories of right and wrong and we have laws that tell us so, but it's the subtle wrongs, the ones that are not written about that often cause so much hurt. So, what can open our eyes? Unless we develop an empathy for “the other”, unless we can step into the skin of someone else, we cannot experience awareness of wrongdoing. So, as part of our personal development we have to be willing to move on the ever-widening spiral away from the ego. Second, once we are aware, then there is the long journey of atonement: the willingness to admit the wrongdoing; the willingness to make amends; the willingness to avoid the same mistake again – and this is indeed a long journey. It involves eating humble-pie, which is always difficult to swallow. Only then do we come to the third and final stage: forgiveness. In the Lord's prayer we call on God to “forgive us our trespasses”, but really it is His gift of grace that we need to forgive ourselves. It is only when our conscience allows us to forgive ourselves that we can be free of guilt and of feeling guilty.

And so, we come to the second part of the phrase from the Lord's Prayer: “as we forgive those that trespass against us”. Forgiveness, like repentance, requires awareness of “the other”; it requires empathy. People, mostly all, are not villains; rather, we are all in our own way tragic heroes. A tragic hero is one who has good intentions, has potential to be exemplary, but who through a series of mis-adventures, mis-haps, or mis-understandings slides down that slippery slope past the vague line that separates right from wrong. In drama or in films, these characters

fall deeply, inexorably, into the realm of villainy, but in real life, most of us transgress in small and thoughtless ways. To “forgive those who have trespassed against us”, we need to understand that the other person is not so different from ourselves. And though we might not have transgressed in the same situation, we are still not exempt from making mistakes. To carry a grudge, to carry indignation is a heavy burden, but still we find it so hard to lay it down because our pride is hurt. But, when we do lay it down, oh! the lightness comes like a gift – it is the gift we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer. The opposite is to seek revenge and to wallow in a perceived satisfaction of darkness. Again, it is ego and pride. True magnanimity has no pride. True forgiveness comes from humility and empathy and brings with it a lightness of being that we, ironically, are so reluctant to receive.

Jesus’s teachings, as always, sound so simple and yet are so hard to accomplish. He puts us to trudge on this difficult and stony road, but the direction he sets us in, if we are willing to follow, leads to an unencumbered lightness, a new freedom.

Brenda Morgan

Lenten Reflections

A review of these themes brings to mind that they are not separate but more a continuous circle. One act feeds another and so on. Forgiveness of a wrongdoing (either a recipient or a perpetrator) requires an act of repentance on the part of both parties. It means acknowledging and accepting actions. I would suggest that it is only through thoughtful and deliberate prayer, can transformation towards true forgiveness actually occur. This is a very difficult step to undertake and it shouldn’t be done lightly.

Like any circle, you easily go forwards, but you can always also go backward. That may mean you have further tasks to reflect upon. God’s blessing comes sometimes when you least expect it or even in the manner anticipated. It is very important to listen to the responses of prayers. They may take you in unexpected directions. Opening your heart and being open to forgive an injustice is a wonderful blessing when it comes.

Kathleen

On my father's side, my grandmother was a strict fundamentalist Baptist. This belief was compassionless and centered on the rules of compliance to attain the rewards. On the maternal side, my grandmother emphasized the 10 commandments but applied with compassion and love and forgiveness plus helping others. My rewards would be the forgiveness of sins and the generosity of the Heavenly Father. I attended a Baptist Sunday school at an early age but was baptized in the Anglican Church at age 7 in the UK with my 2 cousins from Canada. Coincidentally at St. Luke's church in Tonbridge Wells, Kent.

Submitted by John Fuller

I was brought up in the Church of England, baptized as a baby, in Sunday School by the age of 5.(after WW 2 ended).I took 4 years of Religious Instruction in school, was confirmed at age 13years old. I was rather a wild youth, however wherever I lived, I sought out a church of any denomination and asked for forgiveness. When I think of the pain and suffering that Christ went through to give us forgiveness, He guided me to better behaviour through His suffering. As the years went by both in the UK and Canada I have always prayed for my family, the world in general and I find great comfort in doing so. I have been blessed with loving parents and siblings and the gift of my daughter and son, and grandchildren and great-grandson. My life is continually blessed with loving family and friends and my church family.

From Sandra Lindberg

A Lenten prayer from the Iona Community

We believe that God is present
in the darkness before dawn;
in the waiting and uncertainty
where fear and courage join hands,
conflict and caring link arms,
and the sun rises over barbed wire.

We believe in a with-us God
Who sits down in our midst
to share our humanity.
We affirm a faith
That takes us beyond the safe place
into action, into vulnerability.
and into the streets.

We commit ourselves to work for change
and put us on the line;
to bear responsibility, to take risks,
live powerfully and face humiliation;
to stand with those on the edge;
to choose life
and be used by the Spirit
for God's new community of hope.
Amen

