Rev. Jim's Sermon for September 10, 2023

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Today we have again this biblical notion of biding and unbinding. What you bind on earth, we are told, will be bound in heaven. I have been reflecting on this notion of binding and unbinding. It is a complex idea, but it might become clearer if we think of it this way: that we are called to unbind others from our stories and judgements and grudges, from the punishments we imagine for them or impose upon them; in essence to unbind them by forgiveness. And when we unbind *them*, we unbind ourselves as well, we unbind ourselves from anger and frustration and disappointment.

At the same time being bound is not always a bad thing. If we don't bind ourselves to something, something will bind itself to us. And there are many forces in the world that seek to bind us to them: commercialism, materialism, negativity, worry, blame, shame, selfishness, despair, fear.

The only way to *avoid* being bound to the negative forces in the world is to choose to bind ourselves to something positive, and St. Paul is clear what this is.

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

We are called to bind ourselves to love, to be awakened to love, to hold fast to the power of love in our lives. And our forgiveness of others, whether it is received or not, is one of the keys to this power. When we lack forgiveness, when we refuse to forgive, when we bind another who has wronged us, it isn't only the person who has harmed us who is bound, it is also we ourselves.

Choosing love and forgiveness is the way to unbind ourselves from the hatred, anger, disappointment, all the emotional and spiritual negatives that hold us back and drag us down.

I read a story the other day about, Richard McKinney, a retired US Marine who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan and learned to hate Muslims, I suppose so that he would be able to kill them. By the time he returned to his hometown (Muncie, Indiana) he was so full of rage that he decided he would bomb a local mosque during their worship. He said that Islam was a cancer, and that he was the surgeon who was going to cure it. He hoped to kill at least 200 of his neighbours simply because they were Muslims. So, he went to the mosque to scout out how he would do this. He was afraid that he would be attacked when he got there. He imagined himself being dragged into a cellar with a knife to his throat. Instead, he was greeted

with warmth and friendship. He was offered some Muslim writings, which he took home thinking that reading this material would confirm his hatred and his decision to blow up the mosque. After reading some of the books he had been given he was less convinced about his plan, but he decided to go through with it anyway, and showed up at the mosque with the bomb.

The story I read recounts what happened next:

"He entered the mosque armed but faced resistance of a different kind that he had ever expected. Instead of the scenario of killing that he had drawn in his imagination, a number of worshipers came to him and took his weapon away with which he wanted to kill them. Then an Afghan citizen named Muhammad Bahrami, one of the founders of the Islamic Center, came forward and hugged him and burst into tears."

"To this day, it still doesn't make sense to me!" McKinney says of that moment.

Mackinlay learned more about Islam and eventually converted. He is now a devout Muslim and an activist against hatred and bigotry. When asked by a reporter if it would be too much to say that the kindness of the people of the Muncie Islamic Centre saved his life?
He said, "No, no It's too *little* to say."

McKinney was bound to his hatred, but love freed him and bound him to something different, to membership in a community and a life of service to kindness and tolerance.

We all have some unforgiveness in our hearts, even if we don't want it. To be totally free of unforgiveness we need God's help. So, I invite you to enter into the following prayer with me, in whatever way it relates to your life:

Let us pray:

Gracious God, I choose to forgive everyone in my life, including myself because you have forgiven me. Thank you, Lord, for this grace. I forgive myself for all my sins, faults and failings. I forgive myself for not being perfect. I release the things that I hold against myself and free myself from bondage and make peace with myself by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I forgive my **Mother** in her human weakness for any negativity and unlove she may have caused me knowing or unknowingly. For any abuse of any sort, I forgive her today. For any way that she did not provide a deep, full satisfying mother's blessing. I forgive her today. I release her from bondage and make peace with her today.

I forgive my **Father** in his human weakness for any negativity and unlove he may have caused me throughout my life, knowingly or unknowingly; for any and all abuse of any sort, unkind

acts, hurts and deprivations. I forgive him today. For any way that he did not provide a deep, full satisfying father's blessing. I release him from bondage and make peace with him today.

I forgive my Children and my **SISTERS AND BROTHERS** for any negativity and unlove. I forgive my RELATIVES for any abuses. I forgive my **ANCESTORS** for any negative actions that affect my life today and make it harder for me today to live in the freedom of a child of God. I release them all from bondage and make peace with them today in Jesus' name.

I forgive my **FRIENDS** for any actions of negativity and unlove. I forgive them. I release them all from bondage this day and make peace with them, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I now ask for the grace to forgive the **ONE PERSON IN MY LIFE WHO HAS HURT ME THE MOST** for the sake of my love for Jesus your Son who loves and forgives them and died for them. This one is the hardest for me to forgive, but I now choose to forgive them before Jesus, even though I may still be angry and hurt. I also make peace with the one family member, the one friend and the one authority figure who has hurt me the most. Lord, show me if there anyone else that I need to forgive?

Thank you for the immeasurable love you have for me and for your Son Jesus who is setting me free in this moment. I now pray that your blessing will come on all those who have hurt me. Do something special for each of them this day. Thank you, Lord. I praise you for your mercy and goodness. I ask for the grace to always strive for peace, and to choose love over all things.

May the Love and mercy of God descend upon you as a spring rain, washing you from all guilt and hardness of heart. May you be healed, forgiven and set free. And I absolve you of all your sins and join you in absolving all those who have sinned against you, In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Jim Holland