

Holy Cross Sunday

Matthew 18:21-35

A few days ago, I saw a post on social media about the forgiveness of sins. (I don't think the internet is the best place to talk about religion). But the post was within a group of the Lutheran church in Brazil and it was from a person talking about their life experience. The person said that hearing that their sins were forgiven during service was a big relief for them.

In the liturgy of the Lutheran Church in Brazil, there is often a moment where each person, in silent prayer, can confess their sins to God, and then the words of absolution are spoken. I related to what this person said. Just like them, when I hear that my sins are forgiven, I feel relieved. As an imperfect human being, hearing that the Creator of all things forgives my imperfections is indeed a great relief.

When Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his siblings, the idea of a limit immediately comes to his mind—seven times? This question comes from someone within an extremely punitive context, where people and their families were even sold as slaves to pay off their debts. And to receive God's forgiveness for their sins, at the time, people offered sacrifices with the blood of animals.

Jesus, however, presents a God of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, which is a big change. Although Jesus' parable brings some elements of punishment, the God that Jesus is talking about is the one who forgives our countless sins; if we had to pay for them, it would be an unpayable debt. The parable teaches us that the mercy God has for our faults should be the same mercy we should have for the faults of our siblings. But is it easy to forgive the same way God forgives us?

Jane Goodall, a scientist and primatologist who studied chimpanzees for many decades, said that humans are not the only beings to have personalities, minds, and emotions. When analyzing the behavior of these animals, she was impressed by how chimpanzees have similar behaviors to humans. However, she suggested that making peace comes more naturally to chimpanzees than to human beings. Chimpanzees fight and then reconcile. Humans, on the other hand, fight but hold grudges, resentment, and anger, sometimes for years.

Forgiving is not easy. And the lack of forgiveness and reconciliation produces many wounds among us, both in our personal lives and in our society. Especially if in society we have examples, including some political leaders, and I would say big bullies, who lie and promote hatred towards groups of people, discrimination, prejudice, and, with their displays of power and greed, threaten countries with heavy tariffs. And, when they run out of arguments, they decide to change the names of places: like a lake or a Gulf.

We are living in times of many challenges. And, since we are in the liturgical Season of Creation, we cannot forget the great challenge that is the degradation of Mother Nature and the consequences it brings for all creation. Let's remember the recent wildfires, with thousands of hectares burned, animals that lost their lives, and more than 20,000 people who had to be evacuated from their homes here in Canada.

Similarly, let's remember the floods in Nepal, caused by the collapse of a glacier. The collapse of this glacier caused avalanches that got to a river, and from the river, an unprecedented series of flash floods hit hundreds of homes and caused thousands of deaths and missing people. This is a result of global warming, which is likely to get worse if we continue at the pace we're going. The UN warned that August this year was the hottest month ever recorded in the history of our planet. The UN also warns that immediate action is the only way to avoid a global catastrophe. The season of creation is a great opportunity to appreciate the wonderful world we live in, and also to rethink our way of living that causes so much harm to nature.

At the same time that we see and feel so many signs of destruction, we are also reminded that this world was, and is, and will continue to be loved, forgiven, and reconciled by the Creator. And that there are also countless signs of this love, forgiveness, and reconciliation among us.

Today we are celebrating Holy Cross Sunday. And, for our community, this celebration has a very special meaning: the connection with the name of the Church: Lutheran Church of the Cross, and it is also the day when the new sanctuary was dedicated in 2007. Next year, 2027, the new sanctuary will turn 20. The Cross is a sign of Jesus' suffering, but also of God's love and reconciliation with the world, and a sign of hope.

We can't lose hope, and this community has always, for me, been a living sign of hope. The welcome and support for people, support and advocacy for the LGBT community, the Shelbourne Community Kitchen that provides food support to so many people, the promotion of Truth and Reconciliation dialogue, support for refugee families, support for students through scholarships, and the list can go on and on. It's not a perfect community, because it's made of people, but it's a community striving to be a sign of love and reconciliation.

And, again, we are imperfect beings, for whom forgiveness does not come easily. But we are loved and forgiven by the Creator, and we are in our journey of learning to love and forgive. We live in a world marked by sin that causes so much destruction, but also in a world that is built and constantly rebuilt by the love and reconciliation of God. And we are called to be signs of this reconciliation.

When we hear the words of forgiveness and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in our baptism to be signs of God's reconciliation and love in this world.

Amen.