

The following notes form the basis for a sermon delivered by Celia McBride on September 11, 2011 at Whitehorse United Church

FORGIVENESS

DESCRIBE MOSES AND RED SEA – IF YOU THINK I’M TOUCHING THAT WITH A 10-FOOT POLE – LEAVE IT TO THE EXPERTS

TODAY IS SEPTEMBER 11TH AND THERE IS SO MUCH IN TODAY’S READINGS THAT RESONATE WITH THIS DAY.

IN THE MATTHEW READING AFTER JESUS TELLS PETER THE SERVANT/SLAVE STORY JESUS SAYS THAT, LIKE THE SLAVE WHO REFUSED TO FORGIVE, WE WILL BE HANDED OVER TO BE TORTURED IF WE DO NOT FORGIVE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WITH OUR WHOLE HEARTS.

NOW IF WE BELIEVE IN A LOVING AND FORGIVING GOD THEN WE NEED TO INTERPRET THE IDEA OF BEING TORTURED NOT BY GOD BUT BY UNFORGIVENESS, BY HATRED OR RESENTMENT.

IF WE DO NOT FORGIVE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WITH OUR WHOLE HEART WE WILL BE CONSUMED BY THE TORTURE OF HATRED.

AND IT WAS HATRED THAT BROUGHT THE TWIN TOWERS DOWN BUT IT WAS HATRED THAT STARTED THE WARS THAT FOLLOWED. THE WARS THAT STILL CONTINUE TO THIS DAY.

SO MY QUESTION IS THIS, WHEN JESUS SAYS WE ARE TO FORGIVE WITH OUR WHOLE HEARTS OUR BROTHERS AND OUR SISTERS WHO HAVE WRONGED US DOES THAT INCLUDE THE TERRORISTS?

ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FORGIVE THE TERRORISTS?

NOW FOR SOME, THIS MAY BE AN UNTHINKABLE IDEA. ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO WERE DIRECTLY AFFECTED THAT DAY, WHO LOST HUSBANDS, WIVES, CHILDREN. HOW COULD YOU EVEN SUGGEST SUCH A THING? HOW COULD YOU SUGGEST THAT WE FORGIVE THE MEN WHO SLAMMED THOSE PLANES INTO THOSE BUILDINGS AND DESTROYED SO MANY LIVES AND SENT OUR ENTIRE CULTURE INTO A FEARFUL EXISTENCE, FEAR THAT WE ARE STILL LIVING WITH TO THIS DAY?

BECAUSE THE FEAR THAT WE ARE LIVING WITH IS THE TORTURE OF HATRED. WE ARE BEING TORTURED BY THAT FEAR BECAUSE THERE HAS BEEN NO FORGIVENESS.

BUT HOW WE CAN FORGIVE SUCH AN ACT? HOW CAN WE EVEN BEGIN TO FORGIVE THOSE MEN?

**WELL, THE KEY WORD IN THAT SENTENCE IS MEN. THEY WERE MEN.
ROMANS: WE DO NOT LIVE TO OURSELVES AND WE DO NOT DIE TO OURSELVES.**

IF WE LIVE, WE LIVE TO THE LORD AND IF WE DIE, WE DIE TO THE LORD.

SO THEN, WHETHER WE LIVE OR WHETHER WE DIE, WE ARE THE LORD'S.

ALL OF US. AND IF ALL OF US ARE THE LORD'S THEN EVERY MAN IS OUR BROTHER AND EVERY WOMAN IS OUR SISTER. EVERY ONE.

THAT INCLUDES PEOPLE WHO COMMIT HEINOUS CRIMES. AND WE CAN SAY, NO I'M SORRY BUT THE TERRORISTS ARE NOT BROTHERS. EVIL PEOPLE ARE DON'T COUNT.

AND THE ROMANS READING SAYS WHO ARE YOU TO PASS JUDGMENT ON YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER?

WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. AND THAT MEANS WE'RE ALL EQUAL. THAT MEANS WE'RE ALL THE SAME. THAT MEANS WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO JUDGE ANYBODY, NO MATTER WHAT THEY'VE DONE.

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO GOD, EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD. THAT MEANS WE ARE ALL BEHOLDEN TO GOD.

IT SAYS EACH OF US WILL BE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD. GOD IS SPINNING THE PLANET NOT US. WE DON'T GET TO JUDGE. IT'S NOT PART OF OUR JOB DESCRIPTION AS HUMAN BEINGS.

AS DIFFICULT AS THAT IS TO ADMIT, AND BELIEVE ME, I AM NOT HERE TO SAY THAT FORGIVENESS IS EASY, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN DEEPLY WOUNDED, AND YOU KNOW WHAT? MOST OF US HAVE BEEN. IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WE'VE ALL BEEN WRONGED. AND IT IS FOR THAT REASON THAT WE ARE ALL IN DESPERATE NEED OF HEALING.

INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, WE ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF THE KIND OF HEALING THAT IS OFFERED TO US ONLY THROUGH AN ACT OF FORGIVENESS.

AND FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS. IT CAN'T BE DONE WITH THE SNAP OF A FINGER. IT'S A STEP BY STEP PROCESS. AND MAYBE THAT PROCESS STARTS WITH ADMITTING THAT THE TERRORISTS OR THOSE WHO HAVE WRONGED US, ARE, IN FACT, OUR BROTHERS AND OUR SISTERS.

IF WE LIVE, WE LIVE TO THE LORD AND IF WE DIE, WE DIE TO THE LORD. SO THEN, WHETHER WE LIVE OR WHETHER WE DIE, WE ARE THE LORD'S. WE ARE ALL THE SAME.

SO THEN IF WE CAN GET THERE, OKAY FINE, WE'RE ALL HUMAN, WE'RE ALL BROTHERS AND SISTERS BUT I DON'T HAVE TO FORGIVE HIM JUST BECAUSE HE'S MY BROTHER. LOOK WHAT HE DID TO ME. HE WRONGED ME. THEY WRONGED US.

AND JESUS SAYS YES, YOUR BROTHER WRONGED YOU. AND YOU MUST FORGIVE HIM 70 X 7 TIMES.

AND WE SAY NO. UH-UH. NOT GONNA DO IT.

AND JESUS SAYS YES, YOU ARE.

AND WE SAY NO, CAN'T. SORRY. FORGET IT.

AND JESUS SAYS YES, YOU CAN.

AND WE GO BACK AND FORTH LIKE THIS 7 X 70 TIMES. 490 TIMES. AND WE GET TO THE 490TH TIME AND BY THEN WE'RE EXHAUSTED BY FIGHT. WE'VE BEEN BROKEN BY THE TEN YEARS OF KILLING AND MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, SOMETHING SHIFTS. AND WE SAY, OKAY. OKAY, HOW. HOW? HOW IN GOD'S NAME CAN I POSSIBLY FORGIVE AT THIS LEVEL?

BECAUSE THIS IS RADICAL FORGIVENESS YOU'RE ASKING OF US HERE. SO HOW IN GOD'S NAME DO WE DO IT? AND THAT'S EXACTLY HOW WE DO IT. WE DO IT IN GOD'S NAME.

PSALM 103 SAYS THE LORD WORKS VINDICATION AND JUSTICE FOR ALL THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED.

THAT MEANS THAT JUSTICE IS GOD'S JOB. AND JESUS TAUGHT THAT JUSTICE IS GOD'S PASSION. AND JUSTICE ISN'T VENGEANCE BTW THOUGH WE CONFUSE THE TWO. JUSTICE MEANS EQUALITY.

AND EQUALITY, AS WE KNOW, MEANS THAT WE ALL SIT AT THE SAME TABLE, NO MATTER WHO WE ARE AND NO MATTER WHAT WE HAVE DONE.

DO WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS WOULD HAVE INVITED THE 9/11 TERRORISTS TO SIT AT HIS TABLE? WE HAVE TO BELIEVE IT. WE HAVE TO IF WE ARE GOING TO PREACH GOD'S COMPASSION AND GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND IF WE'RE GOING TO RECEIVE GOD'S COMPASSION AND GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. WE HAVE TO.

ROMANS: WHO ARE YOU TO PASS JUDGMENT? THE LORD WORKS VINDICATION AND JUSTICE FOR ALL WHO ARE OPPRESSED.

WE HAVE TO TRUST THAT GOD IS TAKING CARE OF THE JUSTICE OF THE WORLD.

WE HAVE TO TRUST THAT EACH ONE OF US WILL BE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD AND TO GOD ONLY. WE HAVE TO TRUST THIS IF WE ARE TO HAVE PEACE.

OKAY, WE'VE GOTTEN THAT FAR. FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS, REMEMBER. WE'VE BECOME WILLING TO CONSIDER FORGIVING A BROTHER WHO HAS COMMITTED A WRONG AGAINST US.

WE'VE BECOME WILLING. AND WILLINGNESS IS THE BEGINNING OF CHANGE. AND TO HEAL WE MUST CHANGE. TO CULTIVATE PEACE WE MUST CHANGE. TO END TO THE TORTURE OF HATRED WITHIN AND WITHOUT WE MUST CHANGE.

IN ORDER TO BE FREE OF THE TORTURE OF HATRED WE MUST BE THE ONES TO MAKE THE CHANGE. BECAUSE WE'RE THE ONES WHO ARE SUFFERING. DO YOU THINK THOSE PEOPLE WE HATE CARE THAT WE HATE THEM? NO. THEY'RE LIVING RENT FREE IN OUR HEADS. THE PUNISHMENT IS INTERNAL. I HAVE NO PEACE WHEN I'M HATING MY BROTHER OR MY SISTER. I'M IN HELL. AND THAT HELL IN HERE IS MADE MANIFEST IN WAR OUT HERE.

SO I BECOME WILLING. I AM WILLING TO BELIEVE THAT GOD'S WILL FOR ME IS THE TRUE MESSAGE OF JESUS, WHICH IS THIS KIND OF RADICAL FORGIVENESS WHICH REQUIRES RADICAL CHANGE. A RADICAL SHIFT IN PERCEPTION. NOT ONLY IS THE TERRORIST MY BROTHER BUT I FORGIVE HIS ACTIONS COMPLETELY. WHOA.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT YOU KNOW WHAT THAT DOES IN ME? THAT BRINGS UP ANGER. A WHOLE LOT OF ANGER. AND YOU KNOW WHAT? IT'S OKAY TO BE ANGRY.

NO ONE IS SAYING WE DON'T GET TO BE ANGRY WHEN WE'VE BEEN WRONGED. THIS ISN'T ABOUT BEING SO SPIRITUAL THAT WE DON'T GET ANGRY. WE DO NOT STUFF OUR ANGER TO OVERCOME IT. WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE IT.

BECAUSE ONLY BY ACKNOWLEDGING IT CAN WE BEGIN TO LET IT GO. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT I NEED PRAYER AND I NEED MERCY TO LET ANGER GO. IT DOESN'T HAPPEN BY PUTTING SMILE ON MY FACE I GO INTO THE BUSH AND I HOWL BECAUSE I'M FULL OF HATRED AND DESIRE FOR REVENGE AND THE TREES AND THE WIND AND THE SKY CAN TAKE IT.

AND THEN LIKE THE SERVANT/SLAVE IN THE MATTEW STORY WHO FALLS TO HIS KNEES AND SAYS HAVE PATIENCE WITH ME. FORGIVE ME. I FALL TO MY KNEES AND I SAY FORGIVE ME. I'M SO AFRAID. SHOW ME HOW TO FORGIVE. GIVE ME YOUR COURAGE.

AND THE CHRIST RESPONDS BY OPENING MY HEART. AND MY HEART OPENS AND I AM FILLED WITH THE LOVE OF GOD. I AM RELEASED FROM THE TORTURE OF UNFORGIVENESS. I AM FORGIVEN AND I AM ABLE TO FORGIVE.

WE LOOK TO THE WORLD FOR EXAMPLES OF RADICAL FORGIVENESS. SOUTH AFRICA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION. RWANDA'S GOV'T PROGRAMS WHERE HUTUS AND TUTSI'S ARE BUILDING HOMES AND CULTIVATING LAND TOGETHER.

THE AMISH OF NICKEL MINES, PA, WHO LOST 10 SCHOOLGIRLS AGED 6-13 WHEN CHARLES ROBERTS TOOK THEM HOSTAGE AND KILLED THEM AND THEN KILLED HIMSELF.

DO YOU REMEMBER THAT STORY? THE AMISH PEOPLE, IMMEDIATELY FORGAVE ROBERTS. JESUS FORGIVES US, THEY SAID, WE MUST FORGIVE OTHERS. RADICAL.

A FATHER OF THE MURDERED GIRL SAID THAT THEY "RELEASED" ROBERTS AND AS A RESULT THEY RELEASED THEMSELVES FROM ANGER AND FROM BITTERNESS. THE MAN'S WIFE SAID JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE FORGIVEN DOESN'T MEAN IT DOESN'T HURT. IT HURTS. THE HURT IS REAL.

AND CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT THE WORLD WOULD BE LIKE TODAY IF ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2001 THE AMERICAN PEOPLE SAID, "WE ARE HURT. WE ARE DEVASTATED. AND WE RELEASE THE TERRORISTS. WE RELEASE OURSELVES FROM ANGER AND BITTERNESS. RADICAL.

I THINK THE FEAR AND THE ANGER COME WHEN WE THINK WE'RE LETTING THEM GET AWAY WITH IT. I KNOW I HAVE THAT FEAR. IF I FORGIVE THAT GUY THAT HURT ME THEN HE GETS AWAY WITH IT.

BUT HE DOESN'T. NOT IF GOD WORKS VINDICATION AND JUSTICE FOR ALL WHO ARE OPPRESSED. NO ONE IS GETTING AWAY WITH ANYTHING.

IF GOD'S PASSION IS JUSTICE THEN WE LET GOD DO GOD'S JOB AND WE TRUST THAT GOD IS TAKING CARE OF IT.

MAYBE NOT IN OUR TIME, ON OUR TERMS AND THAT IS WHERE WE NEED TO FEEL OUR ANGER, FEEL OUR GRIEF AND FALL TO OUR KNEES AND BOW TO GOD AND GIVE PRAISE TO GOD WITH OUR TONGUES. AND PRAY, PRAY, PRAY FOR PATIENCE, PRAY FOR LOVE, PRAY FOR PEACE.

PRAY FOR THE COURAGE TO LET OUR BROTHERS OFF THE HOOK. TO FORGIVE THEM WITH OUR WHOLE HEART. 70 X 7 TIMES. SO WE CAN LIVE IN PEACE. PEACE WITHIN, PEACE WITHOUT HEALED BY THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE CHRIST.