

Making Peace

Week 4, Day 4

Funeral and memorial services are sometimes tough on family members. At a loved one's death, we rejoice in the hope of heaven, but we also feel our own mortality more than ever.

We wonder if we have sufficiently said our peace. Have grudges been resolved and disappointments been forgiven? Could we have done something to shave the distance that still existed between us? A helplessness sets in as the end nears.

But there is also a warm, enveloping blanket of God's grace over all this. We feel our own mortality, see someone else's, and yet somehow there is an ability to accept, as the Serenity Prayer has it, "what we cannot change."

The only regret we may have is: Why didn't we come to this realization sooner?" Why do we have to be near the end before we can let go? We apply God's grace and forgiveness at the end because we don't have a choice; we need to learn how to do this while we do have a choice.

Forgiveness is all about letting go. Those who don't forgive are the ones who find themselves mired in their own hostility and blame, headed toward becoming the very thing they hate. We think we are setting the other person free by forgiving, but we are really doing ourselves the biggest favor. Forgiveness becomes for us a sigh of relief, a newfound freedom.

The Serenity Prayer, by Reinhold Niebuhr, and popularized through the Alcoholics Anonymous movement, is a fitting prayer for living like you were dying.

God Grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

Part of what we cannot change is what others have done to us. Part of what we can change is to forgive them and release them from our judgment. It takes courage, but we have to forgive in order to be at peace with others and ourselves. We can forgive. We can let it go. The sooner we do this, the better. Don't wait until someone's deathbed, or your own.

Many people do not realize that the Serenity Prayer doesn't end there. The rest of this prayer may not be as well known as the first four lines, but it is well suited for our study.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen

This is the essence of forgiveness: surrender of our expectations, our rights, and our pride to God's will; giving him control in our lives and trusting that he has our best in mind in all circumstances.

Some of you are trapped in the hold of a particularly helpless form of forgiveness, because the person you are unwilling to forgive is no longer alive. You can't find peace, because you can't go to them, nor can they release you. But God can release you, in fact, he already has. All that remains is for you to believe him and let go. So let it go, and step into the freedom of God's forgiveness, both for you and for the person you need to forgive. It's your choice now.

Response

1. When was the last time you lost a relative, friend, or neighbor? Were you on good terms? Were you close? Could have been closer? What were your regrets? Now take those regrets and apply the lesson learned to someone who is alive. Determine a plan of action for that person.
2. Is there someone with whom you are having a conflict? If that person were dying, would you go to them? What would you say?
3. Are you unable to forgive someone who has passed on? Even though they are gone, it can be helpful to write that person a letter, and set them and yourself free.

"...Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."

Colossians 3:13b (NLT)

