



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Sunday October 6, 2013 - Trinity 19

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The passage taken for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel,

“Whether is easier, to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or take up thy pallet and walk.”

Whenever I read the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis, I wonder what would have happened if Adam had just said, “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” Would the God of love and mercy have denied them? Could our relationship with God have been written forever as the history of the Garden of Eden instead of the history of this mortal coil?

But, forgiveness is not naturally in the heart of man. We can neither ask for it, nor grant it easily. Like Adam and Eve, when confronted with our faults, we shift blame and rationalize. Or, like Cain, we despair of the hope of forgiveness, and so we live in the dark consequences of hearts hardened by fear. Because forgiveness is so far from our hearts, we can’t imagine the mercy of our loving Father, and so, rather than risk being denied forgiveness, we live in self-condemnation.

Without the grace of a God who would give His only begotten Son to pay our price and beg our forgiveness, we would have no hope. However, through Baptism, we are changed, we are transformed by the Life of Christ in us, and we given the grace to both ask and offer forgiveness. St Paul explains in the Epistle read this morning that we put off the Old Man, meaning our heritage in Adam, which is corrupt, and we put on the New

Man, created in righteousness and holiness. By that transformation, we can approach forgiveness and forgiving in confidence, bolder praying as Our Lord has taught us that we be forgiven our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Except, we still struggle to ask and to offer forgiveness. How is it that in light of the grace we have been given that we still have such a hard time. The answer is that our souls are under attack by the devil. He is in our ears and at our hearts with his lies and deceit, sowing temptations in the expectation that he will reap despair.

His great lie is that we are not lovable, that we have not been transformed. He tells us that we are so bad, so corrupt, that our sinfulness is beyond the grace of God to forgive. He attacks us on two fronts.

First, he confuses us with temptation. He tells us that our temptations are our character, but that is not true. Each of us is beset by temptation, lustful thoughts, greedy and jealous thoughts, even the murderous thoughts of Cain. The devil whispers to us that we are judged on those thoughts, which are really his, and that we are beyond hope. The truth is that sin requires will. Unless we accept and entertain or act upon those temptations, we have not sinned. Our temptations are not our character. More importantly, Jesus has promised that we will not be tempted without the means to resist the temptation. We should be able to trust the comfort offered in Scripture against the

condemnation whispered in the dark of our subconscious.

Sometimes we do succumb to these temptations. We sin. And the devil plies his second attack against us. He tempts us to despair. Our sin, above all the sins of history, is beyond forgiveness, beyond the love of God. But in the light of sacrament and Scripture, we know that is a lie. The Good Shepherd does not wish the lamb which has escaped his care to be devoured in the jaws of wolves. He searches for that sheep, desiring only that it is returned to the flock, to His protection and His love. Remember the parable of the prodigal son, how in turning in the hope of being fed as a servant, the boy is returned and feted as a son. In this encounter, the palsied man comes in the hope of only physical relief, and he is forgiven, made whole, restored to health and the love of God. There is no sin beyond the grace of God to forgive, and we have to give up the inclination and pridefulness that makes us think we could perpetrate such a sin. We must bring that temptation to the altar and leave it there, taking back with us humility and hope, peace that passes understanding because we are loved even when we are not loveable.

Once we unmask the temptation that we despair of forgiveness, we can open our hearts to imitation of Christ that is forgiveness of those who have harmed us. We are wounded in our lives, sometimes serious wounds that cut deep beyond skin bone to mental torture and heartache. In my own life, I know I overlook my own part in those woundings, rationalizing away my own responsibility and returned hurts, but even when we are innocent, we are harmed.

Those hurts come most often from the people who are close to us, especially family and friends. Sometimes these hurts come in the place we make ourselves most vulnerable, in the church itself. The devil is in our ear at every hurt, telling us that this wound is unbearable, beyond healing, and beyond forgiveness. He offers us fantasies of vengeance for a balm, and the lie of prideful anger, disguised in righteous indignation, as our crutch. Surely God would not expect that we forsake the comfort of simmering hate for those who have hurt us, and yet, in all truth, He not only expects, but commands us to forgive.

Like any wound, our mental and emotional wounds take time, medicine and will to overcome.

The hurt of betrayal is both real and persistent, but it is not beyond healing. Simple time gives not only healing but the perspective that allows us to perceive what grace God will give us in place of our pain, when we finally release it. The medicine of forgiveness is prayer. We have to pray for our own healing, and we have to pray earnestly for those who have harmed us, especially when they are family, friends or parish. I won't lie to you, sometimes that medicine is hard to take, unpleasant in its side effects, like accepting some of the blame for our hurts ourselves. We sometimes have to take that medicine for years. At first, we take it with resentment, but eventually in hope. Inevitably, our regimen intersects our own need to be forgiven, and then we take our forgiveness with fervor, hoping we too will have our prayer answered; that we will be forgiven as we forgive others.

Finally, we need will. Will is opening our hearts back to love. Will is faith that despite our harm and hurt, God has turned them to good for us. St Stephen, our own patron saint, forgave those who stoned him, and St Paul's conversion and ministry was planted in his death. Our Lord forgave those who crucified Him, not only those who physically nailed Him to the Cross, but all of us whose sins required His sacrifice. By his death and Resurrection, He has given us all hope for Life in Him and eternal love that can never be betrayed.

We all accept that we are called to evangelize. We sometimes forget that there is no more powerful witness to the love of God than the forgiveness we offer to one another. Let us pray today, for the hope of forgiveness, both offered and received for the sake of our salvation in Christ.

***In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen***