

LAMPLIGHTER

JANUARY 2008

THEME: JESUS SAID...

Forgive – Again and Again

JOHN 20:30, 31

*“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.
If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says,
'I repent,' forgive him.” Luke 17:3-4*

Dear Fellow Friends of Christ,

As we begin a new year, we are filled with new possibilities and dreams. Many prime those new opportunities with resolutions. “I vow that I will lose weight”; or “I vow to live a healthier lifestyle by eating more fruits and vegetables.” “I resolve to get more exercise in the year to come.” While we may be truly sincere with our intentions, we quickly discover that once again we fall into the same old patterns. We have not eaten healthier, nor exercised, or lost weight. These same patterns permeate our relationships as well.

Though I can't say that I have ever heard these resolutions, “I resolve to right the wrongs in my life, or heal the hurts that I have caused others, or mend the fences of all the broken relationships with family and friends,” Paul in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 4:26 writes, “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” We discover our own reluctance to let go of the hurts of our past, and despite the warnings contained in the Scriptures, we bear our grudges. Leviticus 19:18 states: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” James 5:9 says, “Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door.” 1 Peter 4:9 offers encouragement by saying, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Yet, by not letting go of the sins of the past and by not heeding the exhortations of God's Word, we continue to inject poisonous venom in our relationships. I don't believe or think that this is what we desire or intend.

Instead, as this New Year begins, now is the time not to seek justice, or to make others pay and suffer until the scales balance, but to offer mercy and forgiveness. In Christ God has acted mercifully toward us. If God acted in a just manor then we all would stand condemned and suffer eternal damnation. However God has acted mercifully toward us in the sending of his only Son, our Savior, Jesus. Jesus states in Matthew 10:8, “Freely you have received, freely give.” Again in Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 3 verses 23-24, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” The people of Corinth were to act this way to a repentant brother in 2 Corinthians 2:7, “Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” We are encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.”

As the New Year flips from day to day, we will receive forgiveness from God again and again. Each morning as the warm shower water pours over our heads, we are reminded of our baptism and the cleansing God gives from sin. We can never exhaust that grace as God forgives us again and again. For this reason, as the Lord's Prayer reinforces, we forgive one another again and again. We too do not let the frustrations of daily living with others deplete our grace and mercy toward others. Instead we let the fruits of the Spirit work kindness, gentleness, patience, and love. As we go from day to day throughout this New Year, never forget to forgive – again and again!

Close with prayer, the Lord's Prayer, Benediction, and Song – Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus.