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“Forgiving Fast”

Sermon Series: *Jesus’ Healthy Habits*, No. 6

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Luke 23:26-34

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ 30 Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”

31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

We’re in Luke’s gospel, chapter 23, if you’d care to turn there with me. Luke 23.

As we come to the Lord’s Table together, we’re also closing out our series on Jesus’ healthy habits...a few practices that were part of Jesus’ life that we’d be wise to build into ours.

We said that the first, ***ditch the drama***, meant that we need to know, with the Spirit’s help, when it’s time to walk away from those situations of worldly drama that we can no longer, at least in that moment, meaningfully affect. Luke chapter four describes how Jesus did this in His hometown, and it kept a sense of order and peace in His life.

So...healthy habit number one: by the Spirit’s guidance, know when to ditch the drama.

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Healthy habit number two was ***fix our focus***, as Jesus did, on doing the will of God the Father. In order to navigate our world’s many distractions successfully, we have to fix our focus on God’s purpose for our lives.

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The third healthy habit was to ***remember to rest***...to push back at our “work all the time, engage 24/7” culture and choose to follow both God the Father’s and Jesus’ example in setting aside weekly time for Sabbath rest and renewal.

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Fourth, Jesus made a habit of consistently ***practicing praise***, both individually and corporately. We said that every person worships, but misdirected worship is responsible for a lot of the world’s messes. At the same time, proper worship, worship directed to God, brings healing, not only to us but to the world around us.

There is much value in practicing rightly directed praise.

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Last Sunday, we said Jesus’ fifth healthy habit was ***breaking boundaries***...those human-instituted boundaries that keep us from fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives.

In His years of ministry, Jesus broke religious, ethnic, economic and age-, gender-, and health-related boundaries, because, we said, Jesus was a rebel ***with*** a cause: the cause of fulfilling God’s mission of letting people know that redemption was possible and God’s Kingdom was near.

Jesus carefully but consistently pushed aside human-invented boundaries in order to fulfill that purpose for His life, and He invites His followers to do the same.

So...***ditching the drama, fixing our focus, remembering to rest, practicing praise, breaking boundaries***, and then today...Jesus’ sixth healthy habit: ***forgiving fast***.

Forgiving fast.

Now, all of these healthy habits of Jesus are worth putting into practice in our lives ***simply because God calls us to do them***. We do as God says out of obedience – just because He’s God.

But let me say...these things we’ve mentioned that Jesus modeled for us...that God asks of us...He asks us to do them...***for our good***. The commands He gives, He gives to build us up...to make us better, more complete and healthier people.

Take ***Sabbath***. God wants us to have a consistent work / rest rhythm about our lives because He knows our bodies need that.

He calls us to ***ditch the*** world’s ***drama*** because He knows we can only handle so much stress in our lives.

God doesn’t tell us to ***praise*** Him just to feed His ego. He calls us to worship Him because, when we ***practice praise***, we are rightly ordering, not only our own priorities, but we’re contributing to the right order of the world around us.

The commands of God, and the habits of Jesus, bring health at every level...and that includes this last one...***forgiving fast***.

The example from our text there in verse 34, where Jesus prayed that God the Father would forgive those who ***had caused***, and in that very moment, ***were causing*** His own death, either by intention or ignorance, this must be the most striking and comprehensive example of forgiveness imaginable.

There are plenty of other occurrences of Jesus expressing forgiveness of others...truly it was a habit of His...a way of life. But there are none so personal and poignant as this.

In the very midst of the pain, Jesus was able to sincerely request that God not hold this greatest of sins against them.

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This sort of forgiveness...this is the other side of the coin of love...the coin of **real, full-bodied, other-centered love**. Wherever you genuinely find that sort of love, you find this sort of forgiveness for wrongs done.

This is the way God loves, and so this is the way God forgives...

and so, of course, this is the way Jesus forgives...

and so...this is the way God calls all who follow Jesus to forgive.

You say, "You don't know what so and so did to me! I can never forgive them like this!"

You're right – I probably don't know what so and so did to you.

But God does know, and He also knows that, whatever it was, it was not worse than what the world did to Jesus.

And as God gave Him the grace to forgive, He will give you...if you are in Jesus...that same grace to forgive.

And so the real question about our forgiving others becomes, "**Will** we do it? Will we work with God in forgiving those who've wronged us?"

It's not a question of "can we." It's a question of "will we."

Everyone knows...even God knows...that, in our own human strength, we cannot forgive wrongs done to us...and the more egregious the wrong, the less the "can."

But God asks us to forgive.

It's stronger than that, really. God says that all in Christ must forgive.

But He also says that He'll supply the love we need within us to make forgiveness possible.

God's asking **us** to let **Him** love people **through us...through our forgiveness**.

That's part of what it means to be Christ's body...to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today.

And so, consequently, He's asking us to let Him forgive people through us...which is a practical working out of love.

Will we let Him do that? Will we, by God's love in us, practice forgiveness?

That's God's question to every Christ-follower.

When we refuse Him, we are contributing to the ongoing brokenness of the world. When we refuse to forgive, we are maintaining, or creating new, chasms between people and peoples. We are furthering the damage of sin.

But...when we will offer God's loving forgiveness to others, we are participating in His restoring and recreating work of making things new.

Allowing God to love...to forgive through us...that is His Kingdom...that is the goal of His Kingdom...and that is the restoring work of all who follow Jesus as Kingdom participants.

God builds His Kingdom through us as we will offer forgiveness empowered by His love.

That's how it works. That's how redemption...restoration works.

And that's what will bring peace.

There is no peace without this sort of Kingdom work.

There is never peace without someone deciding they will forgive.

Someone must offer forgiveness between Russia and Ukraine, or there will be no peace.

Someone must offer forgiveness between Israel and Hamas or there will be no peace.

Someone must offer forgiveness between criminal and victim, or there will be no peace.

Someone must offer forgiveness between parties of simple misunderstandings, or there will be no peace.

One must offer forgiveness to self...concerning our own personal disappointments and failures, or there will be no peace.

You see, from the largest of global conflicts to the most intimate conflict of soul, it's forgiveness that brings peace...and health.

No one gets anywhere good without forgiveness...and God knows this, and He longs to pour His love into our world to make this sort of forgiveness possible.

This is His Kingdom come and His will being done on earth as it is in Heaven...and He does this with one person...one Christ-follower at a time.

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Is there unforgiveness in your heart...in your life?

Are you carrying resentment with You today?

Are you withholding forgiveness for some wrong done to you...maybe recently...maybe long, long ago?

You can try to deny it.

You can try to ignore it.

You can try to bury it, but it's effects will never go away.

The stress, the churning, the sleeplessness, the random memories popping up...all of that and more is tied to unresolved, unforgiven conflict.

God does not want us to live that way...He didn't design us to live that way, and we hurt ourselves and others when we live in a state of withheld forgiveness.

God wants to resolve that...even today...and Jesus shows us, right here, how to do that.

God has the love to supply to us.

Our part is to be willing...willing to receive it...willing to employ it to forgive.

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And let me say, we're calling this habit, "forgiving fast" because...the faster we forgive, the better.

Unresolved conflict within us...an unforgiving spirit is like cancer – the longer you live with it...the longer you let it go, the more damage it does.

But...the faster we forgive wrongs done to us, the quicker the health spreads, both within us and around us.

That's why Jesus was quick to forgive...and why God calls us to forgive quickly too.

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Where we are willing to offer it, God is willing to supply the love required for forgiveness.

Just as He supplied it to Jesus.

Just as He supplied it to Stephen...the first person, that we know of, to suffer death because of His faith in Jesus.

Acts 7 tells us that, even while they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ***"Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"***

Isn't that beautiful? That's God's Kingdom. That's forgiveness.

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What God provided for Stephen, He will provide for us. A love within us...that forgives fast.

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The question is not, "can we?" We cannot on our own.

The question is, "will we?"

Will we receive God's love...such that we can participate in God's forgiveness...such that we can bring health and healing to our world?"

God's asking us today, "Will anyone here join Jesus in forgiving fast?"

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Now if you don't know Jesus, you can! You can know Him today. You can receive His love and His forgiveness so that you can pass it on. Just talk to one of the pastors after the service today...or whenever you're ready.

If you do know Jesus, but you recognize unforgiveness in your spirit and you need God's love to resolve that...to forgive someone, you can just ask Him for that here this morning.

You can pray, even as we come to the Lord's table here, "Father, please pour into me Your love for this or that person...give me love enough to forgive...for Your sake, for my sake, for your Kingdom's sake...for the world's sake.

God will give you that good gift, and you'll be set free...if you will.

**Closing Prayer:**

That is our prayer, Lord, that you would set us free from any spirits of unforgiveness. Pour out your love upon us, that we might love...that we would choose to forgive.

**Communion:**

**Closing Song:**

**Closing Word:**

Remember that even for Jesus, forgiveness was an intentional, conscious choice.

After the Roman soldiers had scourged and nailed him, He prayed, "Father, forgive them."<sup>1</sup>

After the resurrection Jesus had every right to be upset with His disciples. Peter had denied Him. The others had deserted Him. Yet when He appeared to them, instead of a reprimand, Jesus said not once but three times, "Peace be with you."<sup>2</sup>

That is the outcome of forgiveness.

That's loving our enemies.

That's loving those who fail us.

That's the way of God's Kingdom.

That is what the Church is called to be as Kingdom people. Receive God's love so that we can be people who forgive.

Thanks for coming to worship today. The Lord bless you and keep you. Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>2</sup> John 20:19, 21, 26