

THE CROSS & FLAME

A Publication of the Vernon United Methodist Church

Choosing Forgiveness: Free at Last!!

"This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God." Matthew 5:23-24

How often we expect things of others that we ourselves won't do ourselves. I can't tell you how many times I received communion, only to walk out the doors and intentionally refuse grace to one who deeply hurt me. My heart was filled with such intense hatred that I prayed incessantly for my abuser to die a most horrible and painful death. I called it justification for the pain I suffered; Jesus called it unforgiveness (sin).

Unforgiveness is a human condition that cries for revenge and is one of the most exhausting battles we can face because it takes place all in our minds and emotions. Biblical forgiveness occurs in our hearts and is liberating because it's the correct response to God when someone offends us.

Thankfully in our Worship Service, when we partake in Holy Communion, all are welcome, no one is excluded, there is a place at the table of grace for all. If we begin to exclude others by their sins, we might as well stay in our pews. Although our sins vary, in the eyes of God sin is sin, we are all sinners in need of His grace and mercy.

Forgiveness is central to Christianity. We all pray in 'The Lord's Prayer,' "Forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us." Throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses parables to teach about forgiveness, it goes hand in hand with the teaching 'You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and money (resentment/unforgiveness...) both.'

Just as a house divided cannot stand, a heart divided will crumble. My heart was broken, and my life was falling apart. The cause was not the abuse; it was the unforgiving heart that I held fast to. There is no benefit in refusing to forgive. When we refuse to forgive those who hurt us, we remain bound to them through the anger and resentment we feel. Unforgiveness is not the *inability* to forgive, it's *unwillingness* on our part. And conditional forgiveness equates to no forgiveness at all.

Forgiveness is not the dismissal of irresponsible behavior nor does it condone the wrongs we have been dealt. It does not release the offender from accountability. Forgiveness connects our relationship with God with our relationship with others and allows us freedom from the hurt and anger we carry. It was this

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understanding of Biblical forgiveness that changed my heart, which in turn changed my life.

Reread the scripture above. We who claim Christ as Lord of our life are called to make the first move when there has been injury. We are instructed to go first and forgive, to give mercy and grace, and then, *only then*, return to offer our offerings to the Lord. We are called to extend mercy without waiting for someone to ask for it. What was the grudge held against me? Hatred within **my** heart for a child of God. What did I do about it? I called him and asked him to forgive me for the contempt I held for him. I asked him to forgive me for the harm I prayed would befall he and his family, I asked forgiveness for believing he was less worthy of God's love than I was. Above all I wanted him to know that God had already forgiven him.

I identify with the pain he has lived with. He had waited a lifetime to be forgiven; he carried a heavy burden and

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Mission & Outreach News

Please Note: The next meeting of the Missions and Outreach Committee is on Thur., Jan. 7 at 7:p.m. All are welcome!

Reminder: There is no Community Dinner this month.

Caring Hearts Tree

The Caring Hearts Fund helps people with basic financial needs: rent, electricity, water, gas, fuel & phone. Because God calls us to be good stewards, recipients are carefully screened and assessed. On the Caring Hearts Tree are tags for varying amounts. There may also be tags for specific items from the wish list distributed at our Community Thanksgiving Dinner. Select one or more tags, place your donation in an envelope with the tag or buy your gift and attach the tag to it. Bring into church by Sunday, December 13. We will have a box on the table in the hall behind the sanctuary for you to deposit them in.

Christmas Food Baskets

We will be distributing 30 food baskets, which have been donated to us by NORWESCAP. We would like to add some home baked cookies and stuffed animals for children to each basket. You may bring in new or gently used stuffed animals at any time. There will be a box in the hallway behind the sanctuary for you to deposit them. Keep an eye out for the cookie sign up sheets!

Interfaith Hospitality Network

The Interfaith guests are scheduled to be at St. Thomas from Dec. 20 - Jan. 3. As the helper church, we supply meals and are a presence overnight. Bobbie DeGraaf will be coordinating this effort.

Clothing Ministry

We are especially in need of people to work in December. The hours are from 9AM - 12PM on Fridays and Saturdays. We have a small group of dedicated volunteers that give their time on a regular basis, but we could definitely use more help. This is an important ongoing ministry to our community. Your help is needed.

November Visitors:

Food Pantry - 70 Families

Clothing Ministry - 76 Families

30 Thanksgiving Baskets were distributed

30 Christmas Baskets with cookies and stuffed animals will be distributed on Monday and Tuesday, Dec 21st and 22nd

Church Finances for November:

Income - \$14,996.10

Expenses - 13,342.10

We have been working with a deficit of \$2,000 to \$4,000 each month. Don't forget that our offerings and tithes is what enables the ministries, pays the salaries for our staff, keep the lights on in the building, and provides much of what we love about this church family. Let's be faithful to our God and church in our giving!!

A Christmas Gift Giving Conundrum

Are you having trouble deciding what to give people for Christmas? Would you like to give them a more meaningful gift, which reflects the true meaning of Christmas? Consider making a donation to the Caring Hearts Fund in their name. We will have certificates prepared that you can give to your loved ones to inform them about your gift.

Below:

A sample of the certificate



Back:

"A gift has been given in your name, to the Caring Hearts Fund Vernon United Methodist Church. This Fund demonstrates God's Love and Light to families in need. Merry Christmas!!"

December 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>** The entry fee for the concert on December 5th is a donation of a food item to the food pantry. Come out and support the local bands doing something good for the community.</p>		<p>1 Tuesday Bible Study 11:30AM Choir Rehearsal 7:30PM</p>	<p>2 Wednesday Night Worship 7:30PM</p>	<p>3 Playgroup 9:30 - 11:30 AM</p>	<p>4 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM</p>	<p>5 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM Tonight This Hunger Dies Concert** 7:30 - 11PM</p>
<p>6 Youth & Adults Sunday School 9:30 - 10:15 AM Youth Group 6PM</p>	<p>7 Alcoholics Anonymous 7PM</p>	<p>8 Tuesday Bible Study 11:30AM Women's Christmas Party 6:30PM</p>	<p>9 Wednesday Night Worship 7:30PM</p>	<p>10 Playgroup 9:30 - 11:30 AM</p>	<p>11 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM</p>	<p>12 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM Annual Christmas Concert 7:30PM</p>
<p>13 Youth & Adults Sunday School 9:30 - 10:15 AM Youth Group 6PM</p>	<p>14 Alcoholics Anonymous 7PM</p>	<p>15 Tuesday Bible Study 11:30AM Choir Rehearsal 7:30PM</p>	<p>16 Wednesday Night Worship 7:30PM</p>	<p>17 Playgroup 9:30 - 11:30 AM</p>	<p>18 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM</p>	<p>19 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM</p>
<p>20 Youth & Adults Sunday School 9:30 - 10:15 AM Youth Group 6PM</p>	<p>21 Alcoholics Anonymous 7PM</p>	<p>22 Tuesday Bible Study 11:30AM Choir Rehearsal 7:30PM</p>	<p>23 Wednesday Night Worship 7:30PM</p>	<p>24 Christmas Eve Worship 7 & 11PM</p>	<p>25 CHRISTMAS DAY</p>	<p>26 Clothing Ministry 9AM - 12PM</p>
<p>27 Youth & Adults Sunday School 9:30 - 10:15 AM Youth Group 6PM</p>	<p>28 Alcoholics Anonymous 7PM</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30 Wednesday Night Worship 7:30PM</p>	<p>31 New Year's Eve Watch Night Service 7PM</p>		

(Forgiveness: Continued from Pg. 1)

suffered as much if not more than I have because he was the cause of the injury. He shared with me that each day he looks in the mirror he hated what he saw. In his own words, "I was just too ashamed and embarrassed to address this. I am glad we spoke; not a day goes by that I don't experience shame and sorrow, but knowing that you have found it in your heart to forgive me for the pain I have caused you, means more than the world to me. I am so sorry. I could never express how sorry I am."

How can God forgive such a man? One word: Grace. The same grace that covers my sin covers his.

As Jesus hung on the cross he asked His Father to forgive them for they know not what they do. Jesus wasn't just talking about those who betrayed and crucified Him, He was talking about the disciples who abandoned Him, He was talking about us when we refuse to offer what He has freely given us. Jesus forgave, his suffering ended. When we forgive the wound is healed and the prisoner set free, that prisoner is you and it's me. Relinquish revenge and receive the greatest peace you will ever know. If

you're struggling with unforgiveness ask the Lord to help you in this area of your life. It is not by our power that we are able to forgive; it is by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that lives within us.

Adam wrote a song titled "October". The first time I heard it I was preparing this article. These few words say it all about why we forgive. "Forgiveness of our hearts, then all the pain will stop. I must lose so we can win this fight." This is the message of the cross.

Don't just be recipients of God's grace and mercy. Receive then go and freely give what was offered to you. "Freely, freely you have received; freely, freely give. Go in my name and because you believe, others will know that I live." Amen.

May the Lord Bless You and Keep You.
Jedediah

Next month: Praying for our offenders, Understanding Jesus died for them as well as for us

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To: