

Lent 5: True Forgiveness – AS ALL AGE (Luke 23:32-43) (13 March 2016)

Lent – series this year is words spoken by Jesus – help us to journey to Easter – famous story (recap Jerusalem-trial). Looking at difficult part of story – Jesus taken to death, yet somehow he says (S) ‘Father forgive them.’ How can he do that? Think about forgiveness today.

Start with GAME – CRACKER GAME

How hard not to lick lips – unnatural (body wants to). Just like forgiveness – it’s unnatural. (S) Naturally want to get revenge, retaliation. Normal human response. You hurt me, I hurt you back (either punishment, or revenge.) What Jesus does here is unnatural for humans.

LIMBO GAME – star high, get lower.

2nd thing: forgiveness is difficult (S). Gets harder as thing to forgive gets worse. Think of small things. Then medium things. Then big ones. Like limbo bar. DEMONSTRATE – manage small things. As get bigger, bar gets lower.

Jesus had to forgive biggest thing of all – not just unjustly convicted, being killed – and yet he forgives.

Forgiveness is strong. (S) Quote Gandhi (S) – just what we see here with Jesus. He appears weak – beaten, about to be killed. But he shows great strength – even now he is thinking of others, he has compassion. He has strength to forgive his captors, and then to forgive thief beside him on cross.

How can we be like Jesus? Comes from being forgiven ourselves. Jesus tells a story earlier in gospels about a man who had massive debt paid (S) (EXPAND) – then meets someone who owes him a little and doesn’t forgive.

Point is, God has forgiven us loads (huge debt wiped): AND we can be sure of that – look at Jesus forgiving people who killed him **(S)**. OF COURSE he can forgive our sins. (Maybe some of us need to hear that today – truly are forgiven.)

Key thing: when we really know that and are grateful for it, we can forgive others. (But without that experience, hard to do it – as said earlier, it's unnatural and difficult, we need help, we need Jesus.)

(S) Forgiveness is freedom – e.g. EXERCISE of carrying heavier and heavier loads. Forgiveness can be like that. Like carrying burdens around. More we have, harder to carry. Forgiveness is actually good for us because it releases those burdens. Not easy – feels unfair – but unless we do, actually paying twice: wrong that was committed against us, and then burden we carry afterwards.

(ADD OWN STORY?)

Finish with Balloon illustration – Beauty of forgiveness – our burden is like this balloon – gets filled with all our hurt and anger (BLOW UP). And like a balloon, if don't forgive it keeps all that air inside – bottled up (THUMB). Forgiveness is like releasing it (DEMONSTRATE) – it lets all air out of our anger and hurt.

To finish: give everyone a balloon – BLOW UP. Think of people or things you need to forgive. PRAY AND RELEASE NECK.

(Follow-up – forgiveness a process **(S)**. Take balloon away. If feel angry this week, blow balloon, forgive and release air. Keep doing it until start to feel less angry.)

HYMN – 738 When I survey – last verse. 'Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul my life my all' – God given us so much, incl forgiveness – let's give him all we can, and ask for grace to forgive others.