

**“Wrestling With: Forgiveness”  
Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson  
St. Paul’s United Church, Orillia  
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*Out of the depths, O God, we call to you.  
Wounds of the past remain affecting all we do...  
here in this community, meet us with your grace.*

**Wrestling with forgiveness, forgiveness for others for the tiniest of moments that begin to create a negative story within us about another, to the deepest wounds that feel like they have carved out a portion of our heart, of our self.  
Choosing to forgive frees us from the burden of carrying around the anger, the hurt, which keep us in bondage to the past.**

**Wrestling with forgiveness,**

- **forgiveness for ourselves for the tiniest of moments that begin to create a negative story of guilt within us...**
- **forgiveness, even for the mistakes that fill us with the anguish of embarrassment, failure, rejection, self-hatred.**

**Choosing to learn whatever lesson we need to learn from a painful experience and then choosing to forgive ourselves frees us from the burden of carrying around the judgment, the anger, the fear, the critical attitude toward oneself which keeps us in bondage.**

**In the book, *The Heart Math Solution*, the author notes that when you hold onto resentments and unforgiving attitudes they keep you from being aligned with your true self. This can block you from your next level of quality life experience. Metaphorically, it’s the curtain standing between the room you’re living in now and a new room, much larger and full of beauty. The act of forgiveness removes the curtain of past burden. Clearing up your old accounts can free up so much energy that you jump right into a whole new house (never mind just a new room).**

Joyce Rupp wrote about forgiving another in her book, *Inviting God In*.

She writes, “Forgiveness is a very significant part of being reconciled, of being healed. Forgiving another is difficult.

I like Jack Kornfield’s definition in his book, *A Path With Heart*:

‘I will never put another human being out of my heart.’

I don’t have to do this instantly,

and I don’t have to renew a relationship with that person—

maybe the person in question has died or has abused me in some way.

But I do need to come to a point where I do not wish that person harm.

Until I have peace within myself regarding the relationship,

I have not fully forgiven the other person.

Praying for someone I need to forgive or be reconciled with has helped me.

I pray by simply naming that person,

bringing him or her to God for a blessing each day.

I don’t specify what he or she needs.

I let God take care of that.

My intention is to make an act of love with a desire for each of us to find peace.

I can’t change someone else nor can I instantly get rid of all my unwanted emotions like anger or vengefulness.

But prayer can soften the heart and open it.

And that is what forgiveness requires.

Going back to *The Heart Math Solution* quote,

“Forgiving releases you from the punishment of a self-made prison where you are both the inmate and the jailer.”

*Wrestling with forgiveness.*

*Here in this community, O God, heal us with your touch.*

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3.

The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake.

Their mother saw the opportunity for a lesson.

She suggested, “If Jesus were sitting here, he would say,

‘Let my brother eat the first pancake.’

Kevin turned to his youngest brother: “Ryan, you be Jesus!”

**Family offers the most intense of human relationships.  
 Passions are felt deeply...and they're hard to release.  
 There is a bond that unites, and a rivalry that divides.**

**Families often exist in tension between the two.**

**Look at the story of Joseph and his brothers that we lived into  
 when we did "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat".  
 Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery because they hate him so much,  
 a hatred rooted in jealousy.**

**But years later, when his brothers ask his forgiveness,  
 Joseph gives it, wondering if it happened this way  
 so that he was able to be in Egypt to help so many people  
 by interpreting the dream that led to his being able to implement  
 the plan that was now feeding Egypt and his Canaanite family  
 in the time of drought and famine.**

**Forgiveness is something most people aspire to.  
 In a recent Gallup Poll in the U.S., 94 percent of the people surveyed  
 said it is important to forgive.  
 However, only 48 percent of the people said they usually try to forgive.  
 Forgiveness is hard in the midst of conflict.  
 In the same poll, 85 percent of the people said they could not forgive  
 on their own and needed some outside help.**

**Prayer did not rate highly in the poll as being helpful for forgiveness.  
 In fact, only one thing correlated with effective forgiveness: meditation.  
 Interesting...since it raises the question,  
 is meditation outside help (which is what 85 percent of the people said  
 they needed, to be able to forgive)  
 or is meditation inner realization?**

**Well, outside help comes to us from both science and spirituality.**

**First, let's reflect on the spirit of forgiveness.  
 A Sufi journalist has written several books that seek to uncover  
 the original Aramaic sense of the words of Jesus,  
 with the recognition that the Aramaic language is filled with  
 layers of meaning about the poetry of life.  
 His work helps us to look at the words of Jesus and discover  
 greater depth beyond the usual Christian piety.**

**One possible translation of the famous forgiveness words  
(forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us)  
in Jesus' prayer is:**

**“Loose the cords of mistakes binding us,  
as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.  
Don't let surface things delude us, but free us from what holds us back.”**

**With this, the Lord's Prayer comes alive and is clear.  
Without forgiveness, we are held captive by surface things, such as our  
immediate impressions of things and events as unfair and unjust.  
When we stop expecting the world to be perfect at the surface,  
forgiveness becomes a whole lot easier.  
When you stop expecting yourself not to make mistakes, you lighten up.  
When you stop expecting others to be perfect,  
you are freed from what holds you—and others—back.  
When you stop expecting the world to be perfect,  
the world becomes a much more friendly place.**

**Letting go of expectations and learning to laugh at ourselves  
goes a long way to helping us live in community in a healthy way.  
Some of you will have heard of the group of church women  
who had a wonderful laugh at life last month.  
Their minister said I could tell this story because it's such a delightful  
story of how good it is to be able to laugh at ourselves.**

**The Presbyterian women were gathering for a tea on Valentine's Day.  
Silk roses were purchased to give to each woman.  
Someone was so intrigued by those roses that she started checking out  
how they were made.  
The rose began to unravel...and it turned out to be a red silk thong.  
The women filled the room set for a proper tea  
with gales of laughter.**

**Learning to laugh at ourselves, learning to find compassion toward  
ourselves, learning to feel deep warmth toward ourselves,  
all help us to learn to forgive.  
And this helps us to love our neighbours as ourselves.  
There are times in our lives when we are angry at others and that anger  
is actually a reflection of feelings we have toward ourselves.**

*God of the loving heart, here in this community,  
meet us with your grace.*

**Research has shown that activity increases  
in a part of our mammal brain during moments of forgiveness.  
Apparently what that means is that our brains are hard wired for  
forgiveness, since we are able to consider the other person's intentions,  
their emotional state, and the forgiveability of their actions.**

**It's been suggested that if the brain wasn't so crowded with  
competing demands and competing stories from the past,  
there would be more forgiveness because our brains would be free to do  
what they can do so well and so impersonally.  
That's why meditation is such an effective tool for forgiveness.  
In meditation, you can train your brain to allow  
your higher consciousness to rule your life,  
rather than allowing your base survival instincts to rule your life.**

**We tend to think that forgiveness is designed  
to benefit the person being forgiven.**

**Research is clear:**

**forgiveness is good for the person doing the forgiving.  
It lowers blood pressure, improves cardiovascular health,  
and strengthens the immune system.  
People who forgive tend to have less depression, longer lasting  
marriages, and stronger social networks.**

**Humans are amongst only a handful of species  
with a brain large enough to think beyond survival  
and the need to repay debts.**

**Our capacity for forgiveness is limitless.  
Both science and spirit empower us to forgive.**

**In *The Book of Awakening* a wonderful story is told about forgiveness.**

**“A spiritual teacher grew tired of his student's complaining,  
and so, one morning, sent him out for some salt.  
When the student returned, the teacher instructed the unhappy man  
to put a handful of salt in a glass of water...  
and then to drink the water.**

**‘How does it taste?’ the teacher asked.**

**‘Bitter,’ was the student’s reply.**

**The teacher chuckled and then asked the young man to take  
the same size handful of salt and put it in the lake.**

**The two walked in silence to the nearby lake, and once the student  
swirled his handful of salt into the water, the old man said,**

**‘Now drink from the lake.’**

**As the water dripped down the young man’s chin, the teacher asked,**

**‘How does it taste?’**

**‘Fresh.’**

**‘Do you taste the salt?’**

**‘No.’**

**At this, the teacher said, ‘The pain of life is like pure salt.**

**The amount of pain in our lives simply is.**

**But the amount of bitterness we taste depends on  
the container we put the pain in.’**

**When we are in pain, one thing we can do is enlarge our sense of things,  
which is as though we stop being a glass and become a lake.**

**By becoming a lake of forgiveness, we can absorb pain and injustice  
without becoming a bitter person.**

**We can come face to face with pain, our own and others’,  
without becoming hostile.**

**Forgiveness is good for us, and so much better than  
holding onto resentment.**

**Forgiveness is also good for the world.**

**Forgiveness is one of the powerful thoughts that change the world,  
beginning with your own inner world.**

**May it be so in our lives and in our world.**

**Amen.**