

The Rev. Kerith Harding's Sermon Easter 2 – April 19, 2020

There is a script we have gone over so many times with our kids when someone does something hurtful that goes like this:

“Say sorry,”

“Sorry.”

“Now say 'It's ok...”

“It's ok.”

Now, of course, the “Its ok” is what everything hinges on. If it is said genuinely, the kids go back to playing. All is forgiven. It's ok.

If however, it isn't, the playtime is over. They are too mad. No more fun.

Rather amusingly, given that there is so much at stake in this, frequently the kids will often not even wait for their sibling's reply. Instead — sometimes before I even tell recommend that they apologize— one of them blurts out: “SorryIt'sOk!”

Like it's like a single word.

They know that being sorry is the first step, but that it's really all about being forgiven. They know this, even as preschoolers.

In this mornings' passage Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. He even goes so far as to say that one gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift that allows us to forgive. *We cooperate with grace* when we forgive. And we cooperate with grace when we believe, know and trust that we are forgiven.

In this season of staying home all the time, it seems like there is a deep need to be transformed by this pandemic.

There may even be a bit of pressure to try to do some self-improving during this time. Learn Spanish! Start jogging! Plant a garden! Cook more!

We are so eager to transform this pandemic into something positive — and I love this about humans — that we are trying really hard to maximize this time, to capitalize on it.

As it turns out, however, this may not be as easily achievable as we thought five weeks ago, perhaps especially for those sheltering-in-place with others whose **very annoying habits** 😊 are making it hard for us to become better people.

Either way - today's Gospel is exactly what we need to hear. We hear Jesus as he appears to the disciples, say: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

We are an Easter people. Being an Easter people in Eastertide means we go about this transformational work differently — by being forgiving and by really believing that we are forgiven — already — for all of the things we wish we hadn't done, that were mistakes, that seemed like good ideas at the time, that were downright wrong.

What if — in this new space we find ourselves, instead of striving to learn a second language or exercise more or whatever self-improvement you've been shooting for — you simply say to God in however you imagine God — I am sorry. And you list what you are sorry for. You list the burdens you carry that only forgiveness can take away. If you do this, you will realize two things: 1. We are usually sorry for things way beyond our control and 2. We are already forgiven.

I saw a terribly sad 60 Minutes piece last week about a family in NYC. It focused on the 22-year old daughter who was home with her folks studying to get into med school and waiting tables. Her relatively young mom is chronically ill and on dialysis, and the 50 yo dad who cares for her was in the hospital with covid-19. When the segment ended, the reporter updated the viewers that 2 days after filming the dad passed away. They called the young woman again and she told of going to see his body in the ICU, of driving his car home, and then she said something that really caught the interviewer's attention: she told of saying sorry to her father as she drove his car home.

"What were you sorry for?" The journalist incredulously asked.

"I was sorry he had to drive himself to the hospital, sick. That he had to do it all alone. That he had to die alone," she said.

It was beyond heartbreaking.

These were not her burdens to carry. But she was carrying them anyway. We all do that. We carry burdens of guilt we have no business carrying. And even the ones we do have business carrying have been forgiven long ago.

But feeling forgiven is not always easy. So what if you took some time right now to ask God to be forgiven? Some things might feel quite private, quite personal between you and god, and might best stay that way. Others, might be things we all struggle with asking for forgiveness for, and by sharing them aloud you might help others. What if you typed those into the comments/chat bar on Zoom or Facebook? And then could see that everything here has already been forgiven.

[So, go ahead. Take a moment. Share if it feels appropriate. Don't if it doesn't. Will give ourselves just a minute as Clay plays for us.]

All those things typed into the comments are already forgiven. With God we never say "Sorry" into nothingness. It is always "SorryItsOk!" It is always forgiven. And, there is no better path to transformation than forgiveness. Amen.

