

Lenten Sermon

March 9, 2010

Today's readings are about humility and forgiveness. Azariah prays to God and humbly acknowledges that this people have been "brought low in all the world because of our sins." In the Psalm, God "guides the humble in doing right and teaches his way to the lowly." Jesus tells Peter of the king who forgave his slave, and yet the slave did not forgive another slave his debts.

Humility and asking forgiveness and offering forgiveness as well. When I sat down to write this sermon, I thought, "I think being humble is pretty easy." I am humble when someone pays me a compliment. I am even more humble when I walk through these doors on Sunday and I focus on God's love for us, and when I think about Jesus, and what he teaches us. I am humbled when I return to St. C's on Mondays to serve in the Water Ministry, as I learn from people who are struggling, and am humbled when I put aside feelings of pity and see them as God sees them, as he sees me, as one of his children.

Azariah says "with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted." We don't have to have the "proper" sacrifice of lambs or bulls or the modern day equivalent. A contrite heart and humble spirit is what we need. We are accepted no matter what, as long as we recognize our sins and ask for forgiveness.

The parable of the king and his slave reminded me of a time when I had forgiven a debt of money. I remembered one of my lifelong friends, who once lost her wallet when we were together, so I loaned her sixty dollars so she could get out of the parking lot and so that she'd have cash for the next few days. And I said, "Just repay me when you can." A few weeks went by, a few months went by, and I was shocked, and angry, that she didn't repay me. Over time, my disappointment in her subsided and I almost never think of it. When I do, I think, "Oh, I forgave her that debt." And then last week, when I read the passage from Matthew and was thinking about what to say today, I thought, "Oh! I am like the king who forgave his slave."

But wait. What happened to my so called humility? It takes utter humility to forgive others, not just to be forgiven. As Jesus says, "forgive your brother or sister from your heart." I am not the king in this story. God is the king. I am the slave who could not forgive someone just like me, even though I have been forgiven time and again by God, and by family and friends, for my many trespasses. I haven't forgiven my friend until I have forgiven with my heart, not just my head.

If we can be humble enough to ask for forgiveness we will be forgiven by God. It takes utter humility to forgive others, not just to be forgiven. Can we be humble enough to forgive his other children as he forgives us, no matter what?

"For your name's sake, O Lord, forgive my sin, for it is great."

Joy Bates Boyle