

Dear friends,

An update on the Ministry Center: Abatement of the building continues. For those unfamiliar, this involves the safe removal of hazardous materials such as asbestos and lead. The contractor has now removed all the interior flooring and plaster and has found a few surprises. Surprises are general a good thing but not in construction. In this case, the surprise is another layer of unseen material, which will need to be removed. This will take a few more days, and dollars, to address. Thank you for your support and prayer.

The story is told of a soldier who was fighting over in Iraq who received a letter from his girlfriend that said she was breaking up with him. In the letter she also asked for him to return the picture of herself that she had given him, because she needed it for her bridal announcement.

The soldier was heartbroken and told his friends about the breakup and about her request. Someone came up with this idea -- the whole platoon gave him pictures of all of their girlfriends and told him to send them to his ex-girlfriend with this note, "For the life of me, I can't remember ...

In the Gospel of today Peter asks Jesus. "How many times should I forgive my brother? Seven times? Peter thought he was very generous because 3 times was the requirement then. Jesus said "Seventy seven times seven." That is a lot of sevens... meaning unlimited.. The First reading starts with the words: Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. Isn't it the fact of life that you and I cling on to anger, resentment and hatred. We have a hard time letting go.

When Bill Clinton first met Nelson Mandela, he said to him, "Mr. Mandala, when you were released from prison, I woke up my daughter at 3.00 am. I wanted her to see this historic event. As you marched from the cell block across the yard to the prison gate, the camera focused in on your face. I have never seen such anger, and even hatred, in any man as was expressed on your face at that time. That's not the Nelson Mandela I see today. What was that about?" Mr. Mandala replied, "I'm surprised that you saw that, and I regret that the cameras caught my anger. As I walked across the courtyard that day I thought to myself, 'They have taken everything from you that matters. Your cause is dead. Your family is gone. Your friends have been killed. Now they're releasing you, but there's nothing left for you out there.' And I hated them for what they had taken from me Then, I sense an inner voice saying to me, "Nelson! For twenty-seven years you were their prisoner, but you were always a free man! Don't allow them to make you into a free man, only to turn you into their prisoner."

Is there any person or situation in your life that is keeping you unnecessarily imprisoned, be it to fear, or bitterness, or hatred?

Desmond Tutu is a bishop in South Africa who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work against apartheid. In his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, he shares stories and insights from his leadership role in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. South Africa had been plagued for generations by terrible violence between the white ruling minority and the black majority. Once the whites relinquished power and Nelson Mandela become president, the question in need of an answer was clear: *How does a country with so much pain and violence*

*and division in its past move forward?* Tutu and others established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a way forward. The goal was for those who had committed atrocities in the past to come forward and tell the truth—both blacks and whites. But it didn't end there. After confessing the truth, the goal was to bring reconciliation and forgiveness—to break the cycle of hate so the entire country could move forward.

I do believe that as a nation we are not there, but the honest truth is that there is so much anger and resentment and hatred everywhere. Just this week, on the streets of Berkeley, there were protests. And I support protests against injustice and racism. But there is so much anger, resentment and hatred. This week we had violence and destruction on the streets of St. Louis after the cop was acquitted of all his charges. I know there is anger right here against our leaders. We must answer the question: *How does our country with so much pain, anger and division right now move forward?*

Well, We will continue to face opportunities in the days ahead when we will be tested in our ability to love in a Christ-like way. In this polarized nation, whoever you cast a vote for in the elections, you will be confronted with the challenge of how well you can love the brother or sister next to you on the bus, on the Bart, in the theatre, in the pew at church whose views of the world are contrary to your own, who views on immigration, climate change, health care, economy and so much more do not reflect yours. How do we move forward?

We pride ourselves in the fact that our country was founded on Judeo-Christian principles. If we are a Christian country, then we must act like one. In a divided country like ours, love is the only force that holds true power. Strength and might perhaps rise forth from the mire, but love is the only sustainable force that will last the test of eternity. Let me say that again. Love—a promiscuous *agape* love unrestrained, unrestricted—is the only sustainable force that will last the test of eternity.

Reverend Martin Luther King said, “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.” Or in other words of his, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

Friends, change begins right here. It begins in houses of worship, where we learn to be more Christ-like in our attitudes and demeanor. If Christ the king church loves one another in a Christ like manner, things would change.

I do want to address this morning our own personal resentment and anger.

Many years ago, an elderly woman came to my office wanting to speak to me about a family situation. She sat and began to unload stuff from her bag, looking for something. The first thing she pulled out was a remote control of a TV, which she set aside. "So, do you always carry your TV remote?" I asked.

"No," she replied, "but my husband refused to come shopping with me to see you, and! I figured this was the most evil thing I could do to him legally."

Let me put a couple more quotes more for your reflection.

Life becomes easier when you learn ot accept the apology you never got.

Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

Forgiveness is not something we do for others. We do it for ourselves- to get well and move forward.

God bless you.