

Gospel Text: Luke 7: 18 - 23  
New Testament: Ephesians 4: 29 - 32  
Sermon Text: Colossians 3: 12 - 17

Please join me in prayer. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

With actively practicing acceptance as discussed last week, we transitioned into the application of the previously covered characteristics. This week, we move into a discussion about actively practicing forgiveness. How does compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience better enable a lifestyle of forgiveness?

A quick refresh on grammar and the analogy the apostle Paul has been building. Up until last week we had been talking about a different adjective every week. We started with an understanding that Paul was asking us to clothe ourselves in the characteristics, the describing words that were to follow. Paul wants us to wear these characteristics loud and proud like we wear our Husker gear. First, we talked about wearing compassion that wells up deep from within; from our innermost being. This kind of compassion could only come from an understanding and acceptance of ourselves being the recipients of such compassion from God Godself. Next was kindness as distinct and separate from niceness. This was about integrity. Kindness is who you are and how you treat people to their face, matches who you are and how you treat people to their back. After that we looked at humility. Humility becomes synonymous with self-awareness. You simply cannot be in true community with people, in rhythm with God and with one another, if you have it in your head that your shit doesn't stink! If you are under the mistaken impression that you are always right and everyone else is always wrong you're never going to grow truly close to someone, or anyone for that matter. You're going to have a lot of surface level relationships lacking in true, authentic depth. Nobody is right 100% of the time. Humility helps us to be able to hold this truth. After that we looked at gentleness or meekness. This ties directly into humility. Even more specifically, meekness is the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance. I know this is hard. It is counter-cultural. But it is possible. Finally, we looked at patience and discovered that Paul was speaking about a particular type of patience. Namely, being able to bear up even under direct, or what appears to be, direct provocation. It's not just about waiting around, it is about understanding that we will intentionally, and unintentionally, provoke one another. And so, we're asked to be patient with one another; to forbear one another.

These were all adjectives, describing words. They did not necessarily carry the weight of action even though we needed that sometimes to more fully and precisely flesh out the true meaning behind those adjectives. Last week we transitioned into Paul using a verb. Paul is saying, you now have a strong foundation of describing characteristics so let's take those and put them to good use. Compassion welling up from deep within, true kindness, humility, meekness, and forbearance will enable you to be an accepting person. *Ἀνεχόμενοι* is a plural, present, middle, participle meaning that it is talking about accepting one another, acceptance is a two way street. It is talking about Paul wanting everyone to practice it. And as a participle it is something he wants us to do constantly. Not once. Not sometimes. But continually be accepting. Which sounds hard *but* if you have compassion welling up deep from within, true kindness and integrity, humility, meekness, and forbearance accepting one another becomes a whole lot less hard.

The word being rendered "forgiveness" comes from the Greek word *χαρίζομαι*. Another plural, present, middle, participle. So again, Paul is wanting everyone to practice it; forgiving one another. Again, as a participle, it is something Paul wants us to do constantly. Be forgiving one another constantly. Which again, sounds hard *but* it does not have to be hard when you have compassion welling up deep from within, true kindness, humility, meekness, and forbearance. And as regards this forgiving of one another, Paul actually takes it one step further. What he is asking us to do is not just forgive one another, but to show ourselves as gracious because we forgive one another. There's a sense here that we are being invited to reflect the grace of forgiveness given to us by God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by graciously forgiving one another. There is a grace component to this forgiveness that we are to practice that cannot be overlooked or omitted.

In our Luke passage, Jesus' summation of his ministry for John's disciples is his practice of grace. Grace is not limited to forgiving wrongdoing, but goes far beyond. This was what the Pharisees missed and we want to be aware to not miss it ourselves. When we show ourselves gracious we do not limit ourselves to forgiving wrongdoing but extend ourselves out of our comfort zones to practice grace towards those who might make us squeamish or uncomfortable. Like Jesus did. He was gracious to people with diseases and plagues and evil spirits, as well as the blind, the deaf, the lame, the lepers, the poor, and the dead. Go and do grace likewise.

In his letter to Ephesus, Paul uses *χαρίζομαι* again in association with some other characteristics to help us further grasp what this gracious forgiveness looks and sounds like. Grace cannot be associated with bitterness, nor wrath, nor anger, nor clamor, nor slander, nor malice. That is quite an exhaustive list! And one that feels very intimidating in our current, cultural context. Once again, we are being called to

be counter-cultural. To live in opposition to, and defiance of, what our United States culture expects of us. There is so much bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor in our country today. It all runs amuck with seemingly no end in sight! As we show ourselves graceful then we resist the temptation to fall prey to these things and even more importantly we show one another, and our neighbors, those who observe us and our behaviors from the outside, a better way. In showing ourselves gracious we reveal that there is an alternative to bitterness, wrath, anger, and endless clamor; lots of words with no action.

As we continue the Easter season, this is a perfect time to practice such grace and forgiveness. God showed Godself as graciously compassionate in Jesus' surrendering to death on a cross and subsequent rising from the grave and ascension to God's right hand. Just as Christ overcame, so too can we overcome. We can resist bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor to the glory of God and God's gracious forgiveness of all creation. Amen.