

Palm Sunday

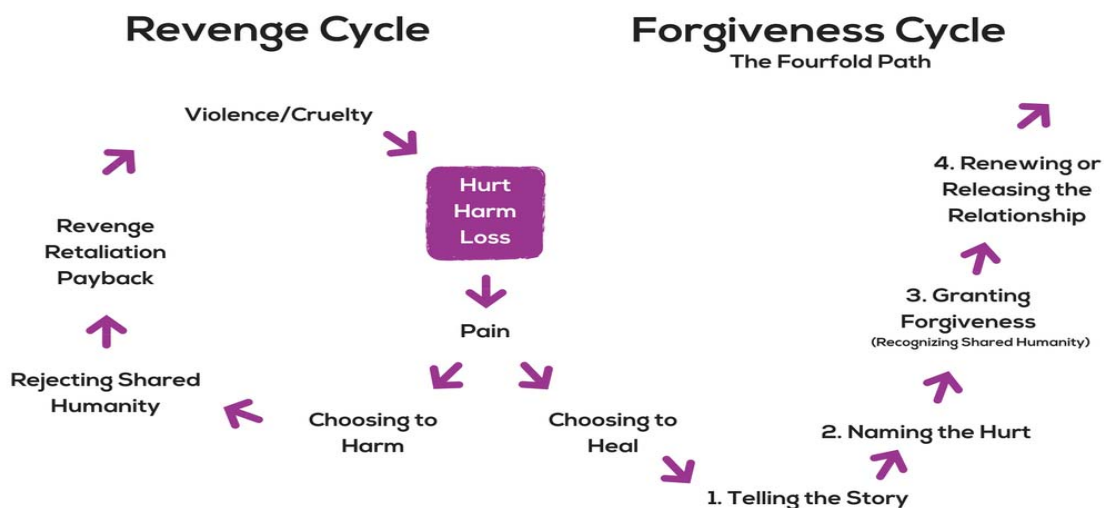
“Forgiveness: Releasing the Relationship,” Rev. Heather Riggs

April 2, 2023 Tabor Heights & Montavilla United Methodist

Luke 19:29-44

29 As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. **30** He said, “Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say, ‘Its master needs it.’” **32** Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” **34** They replied, “Its master needs it.” **35** They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. **36** As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road. **37** As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. **38** They said, “Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.” **39** Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!” **40** He answered, “I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout.” **41** As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it. **42** He said, “If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. **43** The time will come when your enemies will build fortifications around you, encircle you, and attack you from all sides. **44** They will crush you completely, you and the people within you. They won’t leave one stone on top of another within you, because you didn’t recognize the time of your gracious visit from God.”

Revenge Cycle & Forgiveness Cycle



This Lent, we are exploring the fourfold path of forgiveness from Tutu and Tutu's book, *The Book of Forgiving*. Drew is leading a book study on Wednesday evenings on zoom. On Sunday mornings I am using Bible stories to illustrate the steps of the fourfold path.

For step one, Telling the Story, we explored how Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve from the book of Genesis, how their lives might have been different if Cain had told the story of how he was hurt as honestly as possible. How could Cain's life have been different if he had been honest with himself? How could our lives be different if we were honest with ourselves?

For step two, Naming the Hurt, we interrogated the story of David and Bathsheba, asking, why is Bathsheba's voice missing from the story? And naming some of the emotions that she and other victims of sexual assault like her, have felt. Because, "The only way to stop the pain is to accept it. The only way to accept it is to name it and, by naming it, to feel it fully." (p104 *Book of Forgiving*)

Last week, for step three, Granting Forgiveness, we engaged with the story of Jesus and the men being crucified next to him and asked, who do we want to be? Do we want to be a person who chooses to stay in the revenge cycle, or do we want to choose healing and forgiveness by recognizing our shared humanity and saying with Jesus, "Forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing?" (Luke 23:34)

Today we are moving into step 4 of the fourfold path: Renewing or Releasing the Relationship.

When both parties choose healing it works like this:

- For example, sometimes I use the wrong pronouns for my non-binary teenager - this is the careless cruelty that I did wrong.
- Oli experiences hurt, because they've already explained to me why this matters, and I'm not being respectful.
- Oli feels hurt and slumps their shoulders. I see their shoulders and realize what I have done.
- We both choose healing.
- We tell the story - usually I go first because I'm the adult in the relationship. I tell the story of what I've done wrong. "I used the wrong pronoun, I'm sorry, I should know better by now."
- We name the hurt. I'm disappointed in myself and embarrassed for getting it wrong. Oli feels disrespected and invalidated.
- Oli forgives me.
- I promise to do better and we renew our trust in one another and therefore, the relationship.

That's how it works when both parties are committed to healing. Ideally, the harmed party should not have to tell the person being harmed that they have done wrong because people committed to walking the path are actively trying to do better.

Unfortunately, it often doesn't work that way. This is where a lot of us who are seeking healing get stuck.

If you're the one who has been hurt it often looks like this:

- You experience hurt, harm or loss.
- You feel the pain
- You choose healing
- You work on telling your story honestly
- You work on naming and feeling the hurt
- You want to forgive the person who hurt you so you try to have a conversation to tell your story and name your hurt with them... but they refuse to admit they did anything wrong. It's actually super common for someone who has done harm to accuse their victim of being "too sensitive," or "making things up," or "rewriting history."

This is so frustrating and confusing! And sadly, this is very, very common.

Here's why this is so common. Remember how we've been talking about the idea that hurt people, hurt people?

Look at the revenge cycle.

- The person who harmed us has also experienced hurt, harm or loss
- Which causes pain... but pain is vulnerable, and it's not safe to be vulnerable in this culture. So we often hide our vulnerability behind anger.
- Anger can lead to choosing to harm
- Choosing to do harm requires justification if we are to believe that we have a "right," as a good person, to harm another. So we reject the humanity of the person we have decided to harm, by claiming that they somehow deserve to be hurt.

When we are dealing with a person who refuses to admit that they have done anything wrong, they are often stuck at the point in the revenge cycle of Rejecting our shared humanity. They are stuck inside their own justifications for doing harm because they have confused doing bad things with being a bad person. None of us can handle the idea that we are bad people.

This is really, really common in cases of child abuse and other forms of domestic violence. The person who has been abused will work really hard on following the path of healing, then will try to offer forgiveness and reconcile the relationship and the abuser will claim that the abused had misbehaved and deserved to be hurt. Then the abused person feels like they can't forgive their abuser because their abuser won't let them... so they feel stuck in this abusive relationship!

Jesus shows us the way to get unstuck, even when our abusers refuse to change.

Jesus put on flesh and walked among us to show us how to love one another.

Jesus walked around tossing out healing, forgiveness and acceptance like glitter at a Pride Parade. And Jesus was constantly inviting people to not only receive healing, forgiveness and acceptance for themselves; Jesus also invites us to give healing, forgiveness and acceptance to others. But then, as now, when people have chosen to justify their wrongdoing by rejecting our shared humanity they get mad when they are called out for their bad behavior.

That's why they made a plan to crucify Jesus.

It's psychologically easier to do more harm than to accept doing bad things sometimes is a part of our shared humanity.

WE, because we all do this, would rather do more harm than accept that part of being human is that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God.

Now, here's the part of the Palm Sunday story where Jesus shows us how to get unstuck.

39 Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!" 40 He answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout." 41 As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it. 42 He said, "If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. (Luke 19:39-42a)

Doing the right thing was really important to the Pharisees, just like it is for a lot of us. We want to be a good person who does the right thing all the time, so rather than admit that as humans, sometimes we do the wrong thing, sometimes even for the right reasons, we justify ourselves by claiming the other person deserved to suffer.

But Jesus stays centered in the truth.

Jesus sees their judgment of him for what it really is, hurting people trying to justify their

bad behavior because they aren't ready to be vulnerable.
Jesus accepts their humanity.

Notice: Jesus doesn't call them names, or defend himself, or even fight back. Jesus didn't raise an army, or storm Herod's palace, or publically mock those who disagreed with him. Jesus just refused to play by their rules and fight back.

Instead, knowing what was going to happen. Knowing that the people of Jerusalem were going to choose violence. Knowing that they were not ready to change, Jesus chose to recognize their humanity and grieve for their poor choices.

Jesus looks at the city full of misguided people and grieves because he knows they're going to make the wrong choice even though he has offered them every opportunity to receive grace, and says,

"If only you knew ...the things that lead to peace."

It's this choice - the choice to accept and grieve the fact that we cannot make others choose healing that gets us unstuck and sets us free.

The choice to choose healing and forgiveness no matter what they do, sets us free.

This is what it means to release the relationship.

- We tell our story as honestly as we can
- We name our hurts and feel them
- We choose to forgive, even if they don't accept it.
- Then because they will not admit fault, or promise not to keep harming us, or make reparations, we release the relationship. We choose to keep walking the path of forgiveness without them.

Jesus chose to stay on his path of non-violence and reconciliation, knowing that it would lead to his death, because he also knew that, for him, death was not the end.

I want to be very clear that Jesus is not asking you, or anyone, to stay in harmful relationships. Death and resurrection is the pattern of our faith, but this is too important to take it too literally!

Most of the time in life the Way of Jesus looks like this:

We can't stop people from hurting us in this life.

So sometimes we have to let the relationship die.

But we can rise up from the hurt into new life by choosing healing instead of harm.

This is the pattern of our faith.

We do the work of sharing the truth.

We offer forgiveness and love.

People either accept or they don't and new life is born out of the death of old dysfunctional ways of living.

Luke 22:7-20

7 The Day of Unleavened Bread arrived, when the Passover had to be sacrificed. **8** Jesus sent Peter and John with this task: "Go and prepare for us to eat the Passover meal." **9** They said to him, "Where do you want us to prepare it?" **10** Jesus replied, "When you go into the city, a man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters. **11** Say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher says to you, "Where is the guestroom where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?"' **12** He will show you a large upstairs room, already furnished. Make preparations there." **13** They went and found everything just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

The Passover meal

14 When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. **15** He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. **16** I tell you, I won't eat it until it is fulfilled in God's kingdom." **17** After taking a cup and giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. **18** I tell you that from now on I won't drink from the fruit of the vine until God's kingdom has come." **19** After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **20** In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and said, "This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you.

Stone ritual: As you come up for communion, you are invited to set a stone on this cross. Maybe you need to release a person who has harmed you into God's care. Maybe you need to admit to hurting someone else and need to release your justification for doing so into God's care. Either way. Come to the Table of Grace.