



**VILLAGE  
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

# No Future Without Forgiveness

SCRIPTURE:  
Matthew 18:21-35

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November 6, 2022 – Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

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**F**orgiveness is an act of faith. In his book, “No Future Without Forgiveness,” Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, tells the story of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was formed to deal with the countless atrocities that had occurred during the apartheid era in South Africa. Tutu writes: “The act of forgiveness is itself an act of faith because in forgiving one another, we are declaring our faith in a future that will be different from the past.” Forgiveness is an act of faith. It takes courage.

When I was teaching at Columbia Seminary, I was elected to serve on the faculty evaluation committee. This is the committee responsible for making recommendations about tenure and promotion. One of our faculty members had applied for tenure. She had served for six years, was an important member of the community, had published two books and numerous articles in her field and had good teaching evaluations from students.

So, we were all surprised when the senior professor in her field sent us a long letter recommending that we not award her tenure. We heard from him and we did not agree. Other outside scholars in the field supported her. We voted to recommend she be given tenure. Angered by our decision, he took it upon himself to write an open letter to the whole faculty explaining why she should not receive tenure. She was devastated. She thought they were friends. She had deep respect and admiration for him. Despite his full protest, she was given tenure.

We were a small faculty of 37 people. The two of them taught in the same discipline. They could not avoid each other. Their offices were across the hall from one another. She tried to talk with him to understand why he spoke against her, but he refused. It was causing pain for the whole community. Then one day, I saw them walking and talking together outside

on the quadrangle. I saw her later and said, “I saw the two of you talking.” She smiled and said, “Yes. I decided I needed to forgive him. It was either that or keep carrying this anger and hurt inside of me. And I decided that I needed to stop giving him that power in my life.”

Desmond Tutu writes that forgiving is not about pretending that the hurt, pain or injustice never happened. Forgiving is not forgetting about the hurt, pain and injustice. It is about choosing to be free from that hurt, pain and injustice. Choosing to not let that pain and hurt define and control you.

Tutu writes: “The act of forgiveness is itself an act of faith because in forgiving one another, we are declaring our faith in a future that will be different from the past.”

The ushers at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Arlington, Texas, noticed the young woman right away. She was new. She was a visitor. She snuck in to the Sanctuary at the very last minute just before the call to worship and she sat by herself in the corner in the very last pew. She did not sign the friendship pad. When it came time for the passing of peace, she greeted those who approached her but nothing else. Then she left during the last hymn.

This went on for weeks. She always came in just before the call to worship and left during the final hymn. Finally, one of them got her name and number and the pastor, my friend, Alan, called her. At first, she didn’t want to talk with him but a few weeks later, they met for coffee. She explained that she had just moved to Arlington from Houston. She had grown up there and loved church. She had been married in her home church to her college sweetheart and just after their honeymoon, they began arguing and fighting. This went on every day. She started having multiple affairs. She found herself pregnant and decided not to keep the child. Her parents were

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disappointed in her as were her sisters and brother and best friends. She finally got a divorce. She couldn't stay in Houston any more so she got a new job in Arlington where no one knew her but she was still so ashamed of her life. She finally got the courage to come to church. She told Alan she had ruined her life.

Alan reminded her about the call to confession and the assurance of God's grace that happened every Sunday. "I used to believe it," she told him. "But I don't anymore. Not for me." "Oh, it's for you," Alan assured her, "because nothing can separate you from God's love." And when he said that, she broke down sobbing. The next Sunday, she wasn't there and Alan was afraid the conversation had scared her off. But she appeared the following Sunday and on that day, when he proclaimed the assurance of God's grace, he made sure to look at the back of the Sanctuary, in the corner, and there she was, looking up at him with

tears rolling down her beautiful face. Forgiveness is always an act of faith.

When we forgive, we are declaring that we no longer want to be bound by the hurt and pain we have suffered in the past. We are not saying it was okay. Nor are we forgetting because we cannot. It is not within our human capacity to forget. God can do that, but we cannot. When we forgive others or ourselves, we are declaring that we can be better than we have been.

That's why I think Jesus told this parable about the unforgiving servant. He reminds us all, that time and again, God forgives us, so time and again, we are called to do the same for others and for ourselves.

We are called to do the good that is ours to do. So we choose to love, we live in faith and we forgive because there can be no future without forgiveness.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.