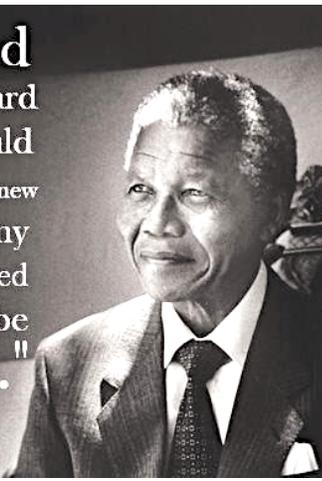


"As I walked  
out the door toward  
the gate that would  
lead to my freedom, I knew  
if I didn't leave my  
bitterness and hatred  
behind, I'd still be  
in prison."

- Nelson Mandela



Sunday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Exodus 14:19-31;

Psalms 114;

Romans 14:1-12;

Matthew 18:21-35

#### FIRST READING

A Reading from the Book of Exodus

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and

the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

EXODUS 14:19-31

#### PSALM 114

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- 1 Hallelujah! When Israel came out of Egypt, \* the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,
- 2 Judah became God's sanctuary \* and Israel his dominion.
- 3 The sea beheld it and fled; \* Jordan turned and went back.
- 4 The mountains skipped like rams, \* and the little hills like young sheep.
- 5 What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? \* O Jordan, that you turned back?
- 6 You mountains, that you skipped like rams? \* you little hills like young sheep?
- 7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, \* at the presence of the God of Jacob.
- 8 Who turned the hard rock into a pool of water \* and flint-stone into a flowing spring.

*Source of all life, you have brought us to new being through the waters of baptism.  
May your love shown in our lives become a wonder and a beacon of hope to the  
whole human family. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord.*

## SECOND READING

A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

ROMANS 14:1-12

## GOSPEL

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ According to Matthew

Then Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

MATTHEW 18:21-35

*So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.*

Many years ago in a sermon, I mentioned a conversation that took place in a Naval office concerning leadership. No, I am not asking how many of you remember what I said at that time. I don't even remember the details of that sermon. So here is a fresh re-visit to what was said many decades ago, when I actually was a young man.

Now in the military, one expects senior officers to rule 'by the book' as they say. Regulations are there for a reason and thus they are to be followed and enforced. In this way people come to know what is expected of them in a whole myriad of situations. Great comfort can be taken in knowing the rules and by following them. Sometimes, lives are at stake. This, in theory, and usually in practise, leads to good predictable results. Our unit even had a 'white glove inspection' to emphasize the importance to us.

The downside, of course can be when expectations are not met and blame must be found. Who or what went wrong? Those in authority had to know so corrective measures could be taken; and so any guilty entities could be identified and corrected, or disciplined.

However, a different scenario emerged in a conversation which took place my former military setting. The discussion revolved about the retirement of a favourite Commanding Officer. This man that everyone loved approached getting things done in ways not found 'in the book'.

Did they work? All agreed — yes! What then was the difference? Where was it written down? Well, it wasn't and isn't! What was it, then?

Ever notice how every work place, every peopled place, has a culture? Offices, churches, families, municipalities and more all have distinctive cultures which become recognizable. Cultures are the totality of people's customs, attitudes and behaviour characteristics with each other and with the outside world. In summary, a culture is the way a group of people interact with one another and with others. Many organizations have adopted written culture statements to guide worker interactions with each other and with the public.

In the military, one expects the culture to reflect interrelationships regarding rank and specialties. In this case, these were still reflected. But this Commanding Officer added another ingredient. That ingredient was love.

Whatever this commanding officer wanted he got, they said, *because he was so nice to everyone!* There were no raised voices, no threats, no suggestion of penalties, no demeaning remarks! People returned this man's love by lovingly trying to do their best in whatever had to be done — and by doing it very well!

In today's Gospel reading we hear of the importance of forgiveness. It is here that we run into the need to discern the subtle, but extremely important distinction between seeing the need to forgive people because it is the right thing to do, even when one does not want to — and a call to create a culture of forgiveness wherever people interact. Yes, we are all called upon to forgive in each instance of our being wronged. But, to leave it at that is to see things in a lifeless almost regulatory way.

**B**ut, there is something better that we can do. And that can be found in promoting the creation of cultures of forgiveness. In support of this, notice that in the Gospel reading how when the King was asked by the slave for extra time to repay the debts involved, he responded initially with, *...And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.* Yes that is right. He forgave the debt, which was huge! The king went beyond the request. The king went more than the, *extra mile!* You see, this king by his example, was establishing a culture of forgiveness.

**B**ut forgiveness on its own is but a reflection of something else — something of ultimate importance. That something else of course, is one's love of neighbour. When one forgives another from the heart, one is also showing their love of others as valued creations of God. When one forgives from the heart, one is forgiving out of the love we are all to have for each other. So when we create a culture of forgiveness, we are thereby revealing that we are promoting a culture of love — just as Jesus would have us do.

**I**n encouraging a culture of love, one is nurturing a taste of the kingdom of God, here on earth. As in the case of the retiring Naval Officer's impact on his staff, one cannot be a part of such a culture without noticing the positive difference being experienced by all.

**S**o the question for us is, what sort of atmosphere are we promoting among the folk we gather to be with? We all have more influence than we may think. Our actions do actually impact the lives of others. It is indeed time to ponder:

- Are we encouraging a landscape of forgiveness?
- Are we helping to set the example?
- How does our love become known?
- How do we show it?