

- She was a witch, in fact, she was the trifecta of “witchiness”: pushy, domineering and rude. She did not hesitate to share her opinion which she valued highly. Others agreed with me about her, even those who usually don’t say anything about another. (Before you start trying to imagine who it was, all of this happened before my current assignment!)
- And now this witch was telling me how to do my job, how to be a leader. She was louder and angrier than usual, even insulting.
- And I responded in kind. I had had it with her and her *modus operandi*. After a screaming match, we both left hurt and angry, the people watching stunned. I went home, so angry I went right to the chapel. My mind and my heart were racing, my hands clenching the arms of my rocking chair, rocking to and fro with enough force to send a rocket into orbit.
- As I physically calmed down and loosened my grip, the rocking slowed to category 1, but my mind raced even faster. “She had no right, and, although my method may not have been the best, I had taught her a much-needed lesson.” With a harrumph, I thought, “That’s leadership for you.”
- Over the next few days though, I couldn’t let it go. Over and over again, I kept focused on her imperious nature, on her insulting attack, on her better than you attitude.
  - Sure all kinds of other things tried to get in there as well, like today’s Gospel, like remembering the story I told you all just two weeks ago about my spiritual director challenging me to see from God’s perspective. None of that was making any difference.

- This went on for weeks, with the majority of my prayer focused on this situation, on her being wrong, on my being right, on my being rightly hurt.
- So I began to pray for detachment: “Lord help me to let it go.” She was a lost cause but I could do better with others.
- I would like to say that God helped me to detach from this and to move on but, instead, God had other plans. God *indicated* not only should **I** forgive her but I should ask her forgiveness.
- Notice that weak verb there: indicated. So stubborn was I, so adamant, that God put this notion into my heart little by little. Still, I spent weeks fighting. “God, I don’t want to face her again, to bring it up again with her, to rehash it.”
- God wouldn’t let it go even as I kept trying to reject it. I tries the intellectual tact: “Lord, look at her history...We both know she won’t take it well...She can’t win on this one, God...I don’t want to look weak or even worse, make her think I was wrong (even if the delivery of the message was off). She should ask my forgiveness, Lord, not the other way around. I’m the one who’s right.”
- Eventually because God is God and I think He turns off His hearing aid when I pray like that, I realized what had to happen. I’d love to say that I did it out of the goodness of my heart but really, I just wanted to show the Lord that my forgiveness would not do her any good at all.
- So I went, and apologized. I sounded sincere and I almost meant it. Now, I would like to tell you that she was overjoyed to accept my apology, indicate to me that it was not necessary, that she was the one who should be apologizing and that after

that we both cried, hugged and then skipped together to Carvel for an ice cream cone.

- But you all know that I don't skip. I would like to tell you that, but I can't. Perhaps she sensed my internal struggle. Perhaps she knew that I wasn't being 100% truthful. Or perhaps she was simply remaining in character. She took my forgiveness as if she had expected, berated me further and moved on, literally as well as figuratively. I said nothing and simply let her go.
- Now, you may think that I would have been hurt again, but I was actually gleeful. I went straight to the chapel again and sat down with the Lord, a smile on my face. I had been RIGHT. "I told you, Lord. She was not changed by my humility, by my asking her forgiveness nor by my forgiveness of her. I was right. It did nothing for her."
- And that's when the Lord dropped the bomb on me. I have realized few things so clearly in prayer, rarely has the Lord's voice resonated so clearly or profoundly, both before and since. It was almost audible, as if the Lord were sitting in the chair next to me. "I did not ask you to do it for her. I asked you to do it for you. It was not about changing her but about changing you, about your letting go, about making real the humility and sincerity you tried to fake, about *forgiving from the heart, not seven times but seven times seventy times.*"
- My case is not unique. All of us have been done dirty by others.
  - Each of us has been offended by many people in many different ways. And we get angry. And we nurse that anger, hold onto it, even treasure that anger.

- Know what happens? It's the lesson I could not learn on my own. Anger, hatred, a refusal to forgive holds us back, hurts us rather than the other. *Wrath and anger are hateful things but I as a sinner hug... them tight.*
- No matter what the other has done to me, the question persists: how can I progress in Christianity if I refuse to let go? How can I be a Christian if I am chained by anger instead of running free to love?
- If we allow ourselves be tied down by our anger, we cannot be Christians. Indeed, anger, the refusal to forgive, will consume us.
- And it gets worse. Our willingness to be stingy with forgiveness flourishes. Like Shakespeare's King Lear, we regard ourselves as more sinned against than sinning.
- Hatred can turn our lives into a prison, needlessly continuing past suffering. I think it's what lies at the heart of so much evil in our world today, of the need to be right, of hatred for the other, and lack of respect: of red versus blue, us versus them, citizen versus immigrant, rich versus poor, Christian versus Muslim, black versus white.
- It's not that we let harmful behavior to continue, or allow another to abuse us, but sometimes we have to focus ourselves, even force ourselves, to move beyond the anger.
- We need to offer up our hurt and anger, unite our upset to the Lord's, join Jesus in sacrifice by sacrificing my anger, my hatred, my grudge, even if it is a so called "justified" grudge.
- The result of that sacrifice is to free us from our worst enemy, free from that which we do to ourselves, free us to live in the freedom of the daughters and sons of the Lord.

- This freedom is far reaching, much bigger than a one-time willingness to forgive.
  
- It is this freedom that Jesus came to offer. This freedom is borne of the love God has for us, the delight God takes in us and is sustained by the redemption Christ offers us. In this freedom, we see and know the whole Christian life, the joy **and** the challenge of being a follower of Jesus Christ. In this freedom is our salvation.
  - Our salvation comes precisely in our experiencing God’s mercy and in inviting others to do the same. This is not merely at the end of life when we hope to experience the fullness of that love and mercy but right here and right now.
  - In our opening prayer (collect) we asked God “that we may feel the working of your mercy.” Mercy refers to God’s salvation in Jesus.
  
- The word salvation has interesting roots in the Hebrew. Etymologically it denotes a wide open space, but it also points to a “broadening” or “enlarging,” creating a larger space.
  - Our salvation is, roughly speaking, a wide open space for God, about God broadening the spaces in our hearts and lives for God and about our working with God to broaden the space in our world for God.
  - We see that sense of wide open space in today’s Gospel. Jesus tells about a man ensnared by the downward spiral of debt. Some of you know what that’s like. You feel hemmed in on all sides. Then the man gets an unexpected reprieve. It’s like entering a wide open space. The possibilities seem endless. That’s mercy. That’s salvation.

- If God shows us his mercy he wants us to do the same for others:
  - Remember our first reading? *Forgive your neighbor [and]...your own sins will be forgiven...set enmity aside...cease from sin... hate not your neighbor...remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.*
  - In our Gospel, Jesus makes the point of the parable perfect clear: *You wicked servant! I forgave your entire debt because you begged me. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had on you? Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers to pay back the whole debt.* And just to be sure that no one missed it Jesus sums it all up for us: *So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.*
  - And it's not just today's readings:
    - Our Lord Himself taught, *Forgive us our trespasses **as** we forgive those who trespass against us*
    - Typically, Saint Francis of Assisi said it so simply: It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
- Jesus opens a space for us and insists we do the same for others. but that doesn't mean it's easy. After all Love in return for love is natural. Love in return for hate is supernatural.
  - Saint Paul reminds us that our God is supernatural. He reminds us that the whole of Christian existence, including death, takes place within the sphere of Christ's lordship and under his authority

- The reason we longer live or die for ourselves is that we no longer “belong” to ourselves. Through death and resurrection Christ gained “lordship” over life and death. This was the very purpose of his entire mission.
- As Christians, we are called to abandon living for ourselves, belonging totally to the Lord.
- This means that all facets of our existence, including our physical death, are encompassed within the Lord’s love for us. And not just our physical death but also the death to self that comes in putting the other first, that comes in reaching out to the other, that comes in laying down our will for the good of the other, to follow God’s will for us.
- It is the Lord’s love for us that allows us to return love for hate, to forgive and to get beyond the anger. It is the Lord’s love for us that helps us overlook differences and see the other also as a child of God, a brother or sister in the Lord to offer empathy and assistance, because he is a brother, she is a sister.
  
- **Lord, make me kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.**