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There is a story about a little boy who was having "one of those days" with his mother. He was doing everything he possibly could to distract and aggravate her. Finally, she'd had enough, and when the boy realized his mom meant business he ran upstairs as fast as he could and dived under his bed. About fifteen minutes later her husband came home from work and she asked him to go upstairs and check on their son. The dad went upstairs and into the bedroom, didn't see him so he knelt down peeked underneath the bed and there was his son, looking right back at him. And the little boy looked at his dad and said, "Look, I don't know why Mom's after you, but there's only room for one of us under this bed!"

All parents at some time or another reach their wits end with their children. However, the truth is we all reach the end of our ropes with family, friends, or colleagues at some time or another. It's inevitable. Something goes wrong or something happens to us and we get angry or someone gets angry at us. And anger is one of the most difficult emotions to control. So, we explode, say hurtful things and sometimes never talk to the person again. But I think it's more than anger that is at work when we explode.

Part of the reason we get into disagreements or confrontations is because we all believe that we are right and the other person is totally wrong. We have the tendency to believe that we alone possess the truth whatever that truth might be. This truth encompasses a variety of areas. It might be political, social, scientific, economic or religious truth and we expend a lot of energy trying to convince another person about our specific truth. We certainly see that in today's political arena. Whether you are a Republican, Democrat or independent, each party is convinced they possess the truth of the direction America should go. We become passionate about those truths.

Religion is no different. Western religion has especially been haunted by the notion that truth has to be the same for everyone at all times which boils down to if I am right then you are wrong. And this thought continues with if I have the truth, I must convert you to my point of view, and if you refuse to be converted, beware. From this idea that only certain people possess the truth some of the great crimes of history and much human blood has been shed. My mom always said, there's three sides to every story yours, mine and the truth. God's truth is found everywhere in many different ways and none of us knows all the truth and each of us knows some of it."

This brings us back to our gospel lesson this morning. It's about how do we deal with conflict and anger constructively when we get into these battles over who has the truth or who is right while learning how to focus on what Jesus really wants from us which is to learn how to forgive. In this early instruction manual for the church Matthew suggests that if you are angry with another or if someone has wronged you, do something about it.

The first thing I noticed that is quite startling is that the person who is hurt or wronged is the one who has the responsibility to resolve the conflict not the one who has done wrong or done something to cause the conflict.

That goes against everything we believe and how we often feel about it, doesn't it? I mean, me? Go to her? She should come to me on bended knee and beg me for forgiveness. She should make the first move!" But not according to Matthew; we are to

go to that person and let her/him know we have been hurt by something they've said or done (for sometimes they may not even know it).

The second thing I noticed that really goes contrary to how we feel is that this is to be done directly to the person and in private. Usually what we want to do is go to everyone else other than that person and criticize and condemn him/her, telling all who will listen how the person has wronged you. It's more like: first you complain to someone who has a sympathetic ear. Then, you take it to another sympathetic ear. And, before you know it, you have developed an entire community of sympathetic ears but with all the social media available to us today all you have to do is put it out on twitter or facebook and it almost insures that the person who has offended you will never get a fair hearing.

If we're honest, there's a certain satisfaction in that sort of retribution, isn't there? It's conflict resolution by character assassination. It's very effective in the short term. In the long run, however, it's not very good for building up community – or, for that matter, the development of individual character or patterns for ethical behavior. And we all do it. You do it. I do it.

But what Jesus is asking us to do is not simplistic and it is difficult. Go directly to the source first. That's hard, isn't it? But there is a reason for it. You have a problem with someone you need to talk to that person directly. That is the only way reconciliation can happen. For when you go to the other person, you have entered into dialogue, and created an opportunity for the Spirit of God to heal the relationship.

Now the remedy that Jesus recommends is forgiveness. To paraphrase his teaching: Get your head out of the past with its hurts and resentments. Put yourself into a living relationship — here and now. Don't get even; get together because to withhold forgiveness, is to condemn oneself to continual anger of hanging on to our particular truths. Being able to forgive is a matter of gaining perspective—of realizing that anger invents or exacerbates its own causes.

Forgiving is a matter of accepting oneself as flawed and imperfect. Forgiveness for others begins with awareness that God in Christ has reconciled us to God. When we accept God's forgiveness, we forgive ourselves. When we accept ourselves, it is a small task to accept others.

I think the best illustration of how forgiveness does work is by looking at the Truth and Reconciliation Task Force in South Africa that was chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu after the fall of apartheid. He was asked why this task force was so important and why South Africa didn't descend into tyranny once again. He said, "South Africa could have descended into the violence that plagues so many parts of the world, but chose "to walk in a more costly path-the path of forgiveness, the path of reconciliation." And he praised Nelson Mandela by leading the people with his example. He said, "Everyone expected Mandela to come out after his 27 years in prison bristling with resentment and anger and bitterness-and a lust for revenge. But he did not. Instead he invited his white jailer to attend his inauguration as a guest. He later took his white prosecutor, who had asked for his death sentence, to lunch. No, he did not seek revenge but took the way of forgiveness and reconciliation and healing."

But Archbishop Tutu also praised the African concept of Ubuntu for helping them. Ubuntu is the essence of being a person. It means that we are people through other people. We can't be fully human alone. We are made for interdependence, we are

made for family. Indeed, my humanity is caught up in your humanity, and when your humanity is enhanced, mine is enhanced as well. Likewise, when you are dehumanized, inexorably, I am dehumanized as well. As an individual, when you have Ubuntu, you embrace others. You are generous, compassionate.

Tutu went on to say, "the whole process of reconciliation is based on the belief that we have a capacity to change, that we are capable of good. We can commit the most ghastly things and yet we can be some of the most compassionate and caring and loving people the world has ever known. Forgiveness is not cheap, reconciliation is not easy."

He believed that it was important and a need for people to tell their story because in telling the story, there is a healing that happens. He said "On many occasions we felt that the right response to what was happening in front of us was to take off our shoes, because we were on holy ground. We needed to open the wounds, to cleanse them so that they wouldn't fester, to pour balm on them." Because, ultimately, without forgiveness there is no future." At the time he said, "We are going to succeed not because we deserve to succeed. We are going to succeed for the sake of God's grace."

To be reconciled, to be at peace with one another, this is God's intent, and as difficult as it is, it must be ours also. Let us offer all our grudges and resentments this morning and practice Ubuntu so we can open our hearts to the understanding of God's grace around us. Amen.