

The quality of our outlook on life bears a direct relationship to the amount of GOOD we believe God intends for us. An essential step for us to take in our journey of faith is the acknowledgment that God is a whole lot more forgiving than people tend to be.

This sermon is about a time when Jesus understood, accepted & forgave one of his closest friends, and how we're to understand life the very same way, shared with the very same Jesus.

Let me start somewhere specific: Have you ever heard the name 'Fred Snodgrass?' At the age of 23 he was a famous baseball player for the NY Giants' 1912 World Series baseball team. He died in 1987 when he was 98 years old. In the course of his lifetime, Fred had been a successful rancher, a banker, a mayor of a city in California, as well as having been a wonderful husband, & caring father of 6 children.

But what the NY Times headline said about him at his death was something else. The obituary read "Fred Snodgrass, 98, Dead. Baseball Player Muffed fly ball in '12."

It happened this way: In the 7th and deciding game of the World Series, in the bottom of the tenth, he dropped a pop fly, which eventually led to the winning run being scored- costing the Giants the series.

(Now I know enough about Baltimore not to mention that NY team with the pinstripes from a pulpit- so I thought I'd be OK with the Giants.- and I know that NY fans are tough, perhaps Orioles' fans are no easier.)

At the end of his life, what was remembered about him was one mistake, not all the good that he had brought about in his life, his successes, accomplishments and achievements; but ONE mistake.

People are tough, unforgiving. Not always, but it may often seem like it.

I can remember when I was little, whenever I'd do something wrong-- something that I knew I'd get in trouble for-- I knew what was in store for me. I wouldn't get yelled at, but my mother would let me know how disappointed she was in my behavior: that was her way of "letting me have it." I'd have to stew in her disapproval. I knew I'd be forgiven, there was no question about that, so as I was aware of her disappointment, she also let me know that I could do better, and she'd hope that I'd know better than to do the same thing again.

I'd like to think I learned some things from her, over time. One thing I learned is that FORGIVENESS goes a long way.///

A few quick 'check up' questions:

How do you think you'll be remembered by your family & friends? ¶

- What have you learned, along the way in life, that makes you a better person for it?
- and, how do you remember one of Jesus' disciple in particular-- Peter?

We can remember Peter for a lot of things, not all of them good.

Jesus called him ‘the Rock’, “Cephas”; “On you”, Jesus said, “I will build my church.”(Impressive credentials!) Peter was a close and trusted friend of Jesus, for sure: accompanying him through his journeys-- at his side at the miracles, when he fed the 5,000, when he calmed the storm at sea, when he raised Lazarus from death.

Peter was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, too -- but that’s where things turned a little sour-- remember?

After vowing, three times, that he’d never leave Jesus’ side, what does Peter do? Just that- denies him 3 times, then runs away. Of course, he’s not alone... everybody else does it, too. If there’s a failing mark in Peter’s past-- it’s as plain as day to see & a difficult one to ignore, or to forgive or forget, for that matter.

The NY Times obituary for Peter goes like this: “Peter; Disciple, Dead. The One Who Ran Away.”

Pretty rough, right? But, when Jesus meets up with him, after his resurrection, its not rough at all-- forgiveness and acceptance underscores each & every encounter.

Jesus COULD have scolded him for deserting him.

He COULD have gotten on Peter’s case for denying him.

But Jesus DIDN’T do any of that. He seemed to not even be aware of any of the past “mistakes” of any of his followers.

In fact, he seemed to have something of what you might call ‘Holy Amnesia.’”

What we see from Jesus in his rejoining his disciples is remarkable, really. Instead of being DISAPPOINTED in them, he gives them encouragement. Instead of being ANGRY at them, he shows his caring. Instead of his demanding that they now get things right, and come to HIM, Jesus shares his presence among them. He comes to them, unannounced, graciously, and generously. The disciples had no idea Jesus was coming.

They took a long weekend fishing; seven close friends, back in the boat.

Or, perhaps, they were going back to work again, doing the one thing they knew how to do well, now determined to ply their trade once more.

We’re not told for sure, but anyway you look at it, Peter was working through the events of the past few days, allowing it all to sink in as he occupied himself doing something he knew so well he really didn’t have to think about at all.

The gospel writer doesn’t inform us of Peter’s long-range intentions. What he does tell us is that Peter & the other disciples went out to catch some fish.

They went out at night, and caught nothing.

They went into the darkness & had no luck. Then, just after daybreak, the One who was the light of the world appeared on the beach. From Jesus came instructions, “Throw your net over the right side of the

boat!”

They fell for it, hook, line and sinker, and it worked. The net was filled to overflowing, but it didn't break.

Peter got so excited that it was Jesus there, he jumped into the sea to be the first to meet him.

When the disciples got the boat to shore, they found bread, and a fire going, with fish on it already. Jesus gave them breakfast.

No one had any doubts about who was with them, and as he shared the bread & the fish, they were reminded of that evening not long before, when he shared another meal with them./ This WAS Jesus. He was real, not a ghost, and he was with them, eating with them.

The message of the resurrection, which is why we gather to celebrate every Sunday, is at first not the story of unwavering believers - unerring individuals, or rock-solid confident followers of Jesus. The gospel story follows REAL people, broken, fallible, and doubting people, who at length and in due time are made whole and faithful by God. It wasn't an easy process, and it wasn't simple.

God had to take the initiative with them. As it was God who raised Jesus from the dead, it was God once again who lifted the broken spirits of the disciples with the presence of their Master, in a NEW WAY.

-- There's a direct link between the "HOLY AMNESIA" of Jesus-- and the gift of God's forgiveness.

One of the greatest mistakes made in the church is to communicate to people, either directly or indirectly, that it is not only our RESPONSIBILITY to do everything God requires, but that it's also fully within our capabilities to do it, -- to get things right, all the time, every time-- on time, no typos, no mistakes.

Not only is that perception impossible to achieve, it's also contrary to the gospel.

God's "good news" comes to us when we acknowledge that we fall short; when we recognize part of the deep truth about ourselves, that we sometimes fail. I've never seen it better described than in an application for membership in the Presbyterian Church - from the 1950's--

The first step for us to KNOW God is to remember Jesus' first words and actions with his friends after the resurrection. He invited them to join him in a meal, no questions asked, bearing no grudges, opening his life to theirs once more.

Jesus wasn't going to let the doubts, misdeeds and misgivings of the disciples be justification for leaving him. He wasn't going to let them go.

GOD isn't going to dismiss any of us from the fellowship of believers on account of our failings.

The GOOD NEWS is that Jesus came back from the dead, not to save just the perfect, or the slightly damaged & confused-- but to save the LOST, which includes all of us.

The people that Jesus healed during his ministry did not HEAL themselves. The people who were

restored to community did not restore themselves.

Jesus didn't call Peter & Andrew & James & John to overcome their problems by hard work & successful life management; he called them to *follow* him.

Jesus didn't say that where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, they could work it all out themselves, with a strategy plan & lots of leg work; but that, where 2 or 3 are gathered, He would be in their midst.

It's not by our successes that we're worthwhile in God's sight, and it's not in our failings that we are unworthy. We are God's children, all of us... & God loves us all, equally & fully.

It's not our faith, alone, that is sufficient, no matter how deep and strong our faith may be. It is the faith of Jesus Christ that is sufficient. It's not OUR goodness that makes the difference -- it's the goodness of Jesus Christ.

The Good News of God in Christ isn't about trying harder, or working smarter - or getting everything 'right', 'cause we can't do it all the time, every time...

The Good News is about turning ALL of our lives, failures and successes over to God; trusting that God in Christ can & will do more than we can ever ask or imagine.

Whether we are Fred Snodgrass, the Apostle Peter-- or whoever it is that we really are, God's Holy Amnesia is another phrase for God's grace -- a gift that only comes through the life & death & resurrected presence of our Lord Jesus Christ... and it comes to ALL who ask.

Thanks be to God, that we CAN share the gift of God's love freely, fully and joyfully. This IS the word of the Lord. Amen.