

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**September 17, 2017**  
**Romans 14:1-12 & Matthew 18:21-35**

Canadians are well known for many wonderful things. And some unusual ones as well. One of them is..... can you guess what I might be thinking of if you were listening to today's readings? Apologizing! Canadians apologize all the time. Even when there's nothing for us to be remorseful for. We say sorry when someone bumps into us! One of my dear friends says "sorry" every time I tell her something that is challenging or painful for me. As if she were responsible for everything that happens in my life!

Many comedians have gotten a lot of mileage this strange Canadian quirk, in fact, I heard a whole show on apologies on CBC last week. And while I had some good laughs, I also came to see that saying sorry can be a strategy for avoiding conflict. And avoiding conflict can be a good or bad thing, depending on a given situation. Sometimes saying "sorry" is a way of avoiding responsibility for our actions and keeping the truth of who we are and what we've done at arm's length. We use our apology to silence another, because it's too difficult to listen to the other person tell us how our behaviour has hurt them. And other times, we don't say we're sorry because it's painful to admit to ourselves what we've done. But sometimes, saying sorry can diffuse a potentially volatile situation. (Jim and the motorcycle guy)

Today's readings from Paul's letter to the Romans and from the Gospel of Matthew carry on from last week's focus on forgiveness – our need to accept that we are all stepping on each other's toes and hurting each other sometimes intentionally but most often, unintentionally – sometimes without even any awareness. (Story of woman who write about abuse for Island Parent)

Because we are a forgiven people, as Christians, we are called to live out that sense of forgiveness and pay it forward. We are called to not abandon people out of anger and hurt, but to forgive them. And when we feel badly about what we've done, to ask for another's forgiveness. For this is how we grow, in relationship, in openness to one another with all our warts and the irritating and hurtful things we do and say.

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. I heard some feedback from my sermon last week where people were wondering if they needed to reach out to someone with whom they were no longer in relationship; or they were in relationship, but it was a painful one.

Forgiveness is part of the process of reconciliation. But it stands alone. Because we can forgive someone and not be reconciled to them. Through forgiving another person, we become free from bitterness and anger, and our hearts become soft and open. We may decide to reach out to the other, but we may also decide not to.

We have to be discerning people. We don't put our hands out to pat a dog if we have been bitten by that dog in the past and it is

growling at us when we approach. We don't share our vulnerability when we don't feel strong enough to take care of ourselves.

The work we're being asked to do is internal initially. To take the time in prayer and reflection to really and honestly let go of the anger, hate, jealousy, fear and pain that binds us up.

There is an important difference between judgment and discernment. We don't have to judge another person to discern that it not a good idea for us to share confidences, with them or entrust the care of a loved one to them, or perhaps even seek them out. Timing is of the essence. We need to discern, and that takes prayer, wisdom and skill.

The way we speak to another is always of key importance. We had some great examples in Bible Study this week. We determined that our intention is paramount. And today's reading from the letter to the Romans affirms this. Whatever we do, if we do it in honour of the Lord, we are on the right track.

If we seek reconciliation without forgiving the other as we have been forgiven, we run the risk of stirring the pot and creating more upset. If we seek judgment, trying to convince ourselves of who is right and who is wrong, we will definitely run amok.

Forgiveness involves understanding our own behaviour, our own part in a conflict, and compassion for the other person. Only when our hearts are soft and open, and our minds clear and prepared, are we ready to pursue reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a focus of the Diocesan vision this year. And what we've learned so far, is that we need to learn what reconciliation is first before we even think about engaging in the work of reconciliation.

But as individuals, we don't have to wait. And we don't have to be alone. Because together, each Sunday, we say the words to inform our hearts and minds, that we all sin, we all miss the mark, and that as a Christian community we are called to support each other in becoming more compassionate and skilled.

While reconciliation is an ongoing process, and we have a lot to learn about it, it is a recurring call in the Gospels. Jesus talks about loving and forgiving one's neighbour over and over again. We are called to love others, as God loves us.

This seems to be the work the church is called to. Not to focus on our brokenness but to accept our own and others' brokenness as a reality of life, and to love each other humbly from this place, not taking each other's clumsiness personally but holding each other kindly and compassionately, and sometimes firmly, knowing that all will be well. And our belovedness is never in question.

Thanks be to God.