

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven. Whose sins you retain, are retained.”

John 20: 24

Forgiven sins. We each have a basic understanding of what a forgiven sin is. Someone has hurt us or offended or wounded us or damaged us. Perhaps they did us some harm. We know what they have done. We were negatively impacted by what they did. But now we are the point in our lives where we want to forgive them for what they have done. We do this because the One in whom we believe, Jesus Christ, himself did this. Even as he hung upon the cross. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult part of following Jesus, if not THE most difficult dimension. There is something deep inside of us that resist forgiveness precisely because of the hurt and the injury. It is almost as if we will fall to pieces if we forgive another person. It is almost as if the center will not hold. But the center does hold and when we forgive others we ourselves are healed in ways that we could never have anticipated. We think forgiveness is about the other, the one who sinned. I find it is much more about me, the one who has been sinned against.

But what about the sins of those we retain. What precisely does that mean? I think for many of us we understand this as resistance on the part of the sinner. They don't want to be forgiven because they don't believe they have sinned. So their sins are not forgiven. Their sins are retained. But is that really what Jesus is saying here? What if retained sins is about the hardness of our own UNFORGIVING heart and not the other person? What if Jesus is saying, “Hey. If you don't forgive another's sins then their sins are retained.” It is not something that Jesus is recommending we do. “Retain their sins!” No. He is saying that if we will not let the sins of another go, if we will retain their sins no matter what then their sins actually will be retained. But that is not a good thing. The good thing is always forgiveness. And we need to search for the opportunities to do this forgiveness and look for ways NOT to retain the sins of someone who has hurt us or those we love. Let us pray for the grace never to retain sins and always to forgive sins. Can we remember to do that? The question of the week.