

**September 13, 2020**

**Rev Jen's 21st Love Letter From Lockdown**

Greetings members, adherents, family, and friends of Cliff Avenue United Church, September blessings to you. Here we are in the transition from summer to fall. The back to school, back to work, back to church energy is in the air. Can you feel it? I feel the energy and excitement of this time of year. Do you?

One piece of my excitement is the **2019 AGM 2020 congregational meeting** scheduled for **September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020**. This is a critical meeting in the life and ministry of this church. On that day we will discuss, discern, and decide the way forward. Please plan to “be there” in person, on zoom, in spirit and in prayer.

Another piece of my excitement is that the church now has a zoom account and we are exploring how to use it for worship and fellowship. Since March 2020 we have been offering “do it yourself/worship anytime at home” email/website/mailout worship services. Now, with zoom, new options are available for “gathering” and seeing one another. So we are exploring our options and possible next steps.

And in a few short weeks, we will pass the one-year mark of our two-year pastoral relationship. And what a year it has been!

By now most of you know that I love “F” words. Faith, fellowship, following, the future, and other “F” words not to be mentioned here. You also know a bit about WTF!? and the critical question of “Where’s the Faith?”.

This week there are many WTF!?’s that focus on **forgiveness**.

Forgiveness received...WITH TOTAL FORGIVENESS – When there’s forgiveness...then wondrous things follow. The grace of God’s forgiveness is a hallmark of the kingdom of God.

Forgiveness given- WILLING to FORGIVE!? WHO TO FORGIVE!? WHEN TO FORGIVE!? The text of the day is very clear about all of this.

Once again we hear Peter ask...If another member of the church sins against me...how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?

WTF!? Who to forgive?

Me

You

Those that sin against us...

Forgive us our trespasses...sins...wrong-doing, evil intentions, acts of vengeance etc. Forgive us for hurting others, for gossiping and being two-faced, for our cowardice at resolving conflicts and our avoidance of the things we just don't want to deal with. Forgive us our trespasses we pray.

Forgive us...and liberate us to forgive ourselves and others...especially those who sin against us. Family....friends....colleagues....communities...many can sin against us. We can and do sin against many. We are all in this together. We are all "of a sinful nature" born with the capacity to sin. We are all involved in the sin of this world even when we think we are not! Like the Pandemic, we're all in this together.

And Jesus responds to the questions of How often should I forgive? As many as seven times? with "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times." He then proceeds to tell them the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Seventy-seven times? That's a lot of forgiveness. And it has to be from the heart, from the seat of our emotions...genuine and authentic.

As we discussed last week, conflict resolution is hard. In the Matthew text, Jesus outlines a process to address conflict in the church as one of the ways to bring right relationship within the church. This week the work is on the restoration of relationships and the community. How do we respond and recover when church members sin against us?

When I was a student at the Vancouver School of Theology, I learned the term BRE (Bad Religious Experience) and the deep recognition that many people (if not all) had some experience with BRE. Some bad religious experience led folks away from the church and some experience led them deeper into conflict resolution and returning to right relationship. Through the bad religious experience they faced the pain and suffering of sin and the prospects and pathways of recovery,

restoration, and right relationship. Forgiveness figures prominently in the “return to right relationship “ process.

Forgiveness...forgave, forgiven, forgiving...to cease to feel angry or bitter towards (a person) or about (an offence). Forgiveness.

Cease to feel angry...

Cease to feel bitter...

Able to let it go...

Seems easy enough...but it isn't. Forgiveness is hard work. Forgiveness takes works. You have to be ready and willing and able and that may take some time and some work just to get you to the point of readiness to forgive.

Have you been sinned against by a member of the church?

Did you seek to resolve the conflict according to the way presented in Matthew 18: 15-20?

Are you still holding on to the old story of sin and using it against another?

Perhaps you have drawn the line and withdrawn from relationship or membership in the church?

Wherever you may be in the way of sin...forgiveness is the way out... for all of us...forgiveness is the way to return to right relationship after the sin has occurred. Forgiveness leads the way to the return to right relationship. And it is critical for the continuation and restoration of community.

Cliff Ave UC has a history of pain and sorrow in the pastoral relationship. The history of the past plays out in the present and we are living with the leftovers of sin. The work of forgiveness is ever before us and is still to be done.

Are you holding on to the sins of the past? Are you holding on to the hurt and refusing to let it go? Are you stuck in wrong relationship?

The power of forgiveness is available for us. The grace of forgiveness is given to us. We repeatedly confess, seek forgiveness and the return to right relationship, and are restored and renewed to new life through the power of resurrection...again and again.

When we forgive others...we participate in making right relationship. When we are willing to forgive, over and over again, we are participating in making the kingdom come right here and now.

Do you need/want to forgive and be forgiven?

Do you want right relationship in the church? In your home? In your heart?

“Forgiveness...pardoning or remitting an offence. It restores a good relationship with God, others, or the self after sin or alienation.”

Forgiveness of Sins – God’s action in pardoning or remitting sinful offences, which includes canceling the penalties that such acts would have merited. Forgiveness of sins comes through Jesus Christ and is to be the mark of the Christians’ life as well.” (Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms)

We are deep into Pandemic living. Many are experiencing COVID 19 pandemic fatigue. Tired of the change, loss, grief, and adjustments of the pandemic life. Tired of being careful and trying not to be fearful. Tired of not knowing when this will end. Tired of the collateral damage from the pandemic and the economic burdens that we bear. Tired of the sins of this world and the constant barrage of the news.

Into these challenging times the Holy Word speaks and stirs up the WTF!? questions and response. We the followers...we the faithful need to be willing to forgive.

When there’s fellowship and right relationship in the body of Christ wondrous things follow. When we forgive and are forgiven we are renewed and restored and returned to right relationship.

We the forgiven...we the forgiving...when there’s forgiveness...we touch the kingdom of God and get a taste of “What total forgiveness” feels like.

When there’s forgiveness...there is hope. There is possibility. There is love. There is faith. Revealing itself again and again. Renewing us. There is good news in our capacity to grow, learn and turn from sin. Forgive... again and again and again and again.

May we be willing to forgive! May we be willing to let go. May we be willing to be restored to new life.

From the research this week...

"Jesus calls each of us to leave the quantities behind and embrace forgiveness as a quality of mind and heart, an ongoing bearing, a way of walking, a skillset for living, seventy times seventy times seven. For then forgiveness won't be something we do. It'll be part of who we are, givers and receivers of mercy, children of God living by the grace of God". (SALT Lectionary Commentary).

Let us continue to practice forgiveness...giving and receiving. And let us be restored to life abundant. May we forgive and move forward with faith! Amen and God bless.

From Rev Jen