**Purposeful actions** Luke 6:27-38; Genesis 45:3-11, 15 Sunday February 20 2022.

I assume you probably recall the Abdullah family who lost 3 children and their niece when a drunken drug effected driver mounted the pavement crashing into them in 2020. After the tragedy the parents wrote a letter in which they pledged to forgive the driver and they have maintained this commitment over the eighteen months since this tragedy.[[1]](#footnote-1) The family have become well known particularly because they chose to forgive.

It’s a wonderful story of people actively expressing their faith. Their actions in no way minimised the appalling choices made by this man, or the wider issues in our society with addictions and reckless driving. However they refused to become bitter or vindictive, they chose to take action, and the action they took was to forgive.

**What is forgiveness?**

Forgiveness does not overrule justice, forgiveness deals with our propensity towards vindictiveness. It frees the giver from ongoing bitterness and resentment. It in no way assumes the actions are overlooked, or accepted as reasonable.

The passages we read today are not encouraging tolerance of abusive behaviour, rather these passages are about not allowing ourselves to be bound by the actions of others. They are about freedom for the oppressed.

Our commitment to forgive does not instantly change intense feelings of grief or betrayal but it does free us in our suffering to work through our feelings, and to be open to the healing power of God.

**Who are the enemies?**

Our gospel reading today speaks about how ‘enemies” should be treated, but “enemies’ in this culture had quite a broad meaning including anyone who was not a friend, family member or a respected member of society. So the poor, the sick, those who were suffering from mental health issues, prisoners, and slaves could fall into this category, as well as people who were seen more traditionally as enemies.

The social and economic culture of Jesus time was based on expectations surrounding mutual obligations, motivated by desires for honour and status. Jesus rejects these cultural norms and calls his followers to live God’s way through offering others unmerited forgiveness.[[2]](#footnote-2) Jesus followers are called to a counter-cultural lifestyle.

Jesus highlights the importance of taking action when we are confronted by people who are not treating us as we believe we should be treated, or by people who are in significant need.

**Called to practical active choices**

Jesus followers are called to be pro-active, not passive, to act intentionally so that they don’t react unintentionally. They are encouraged to respond using the principles of forgiveness, love and generosity. This is done in response to God’s constant grace and kindness even to the ungrateful and selfish.[[3]](#footnote-3) Their actions were to be motivated by the God they worshipped.

Jesus called and continues to call his followers to live by new values, the values of God’s kingdom. He made it clear and practical. They were to love their enemies, to do good to them and to give generously to those in need. To love their enemies was revolutionary! This is an amazing challenge. One that appears to require super-human talents – indeed it requires the transforming work of God within us to engender such a quality of love even for those we would by nature prefer to avoid.

A little earlier in this chapter we read Jesus declaring, “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

This is such a stark contrast to something I was reading recently where the *author reflected that ““Nursing a grudge” was an interesting* phrase because some people are “tender to their resentments, as of the thing closest to their hearts.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Jesus calls his followers to reject the lure of resentment and bearing a grudge and instead to be active in love and forgiveness.

“Love is expressed in doing good,” by being proactive, by “doing good, by blessing, by praying, and by offering the second cheek and the shirt along with the coat.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Such actions are motivated by a desire for the other person’s wellbeing, by a commitment to act generously towards them, to love them in the way we act and through our speech and attitudes.

Some years ago when my children were young a conflict developed within one of our groups of friends around differences in parenting styles. Of course most people are very sensitive to such comments. I felt disappointed and shocked by this conflict situation. It became clear that I would need to forgive some in the group for comments they made. It proved to be a challenging task for me, I would pray and seek to forgive and then the emotions of the situation would overwhelm me once more. I began to realise that I needed to be more practical and positive in my praying I needed to pray specifically that they would be blessed in the various aspects of their lives. When I continued to do this I saw that my attitudes and feeling were also being changed.

The story of Joseph which we read today is another story of someone who chose to forgive in a situation where he must have been profoundly hurt and distressed by the actions of his brothers. Yet Joseph chose to look to God and to forgive them.

So we are called to love those who do not seem to love us. To love those with whom we share little common ground, to love those on the margins of our society, those who are often ignored or berated.

We are called to intentionally take the initiative to forgive others, and we are promised that our God who has forgiven us and who constantly reaches out to us in love will equip us to live this way.

1. Transcript from sbs news https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/humanity-came-together-how-this-family-forgave-the-killer-of-their-children-and-united-a-community [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997) 273 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fred B Craddock, *Luke,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 6:22-23 NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead,* (London: Virago Press, 2006) 134 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 272 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)