

Gen 50:15-21; Psalm 103:1-13; Rom 14:1-12; Matt 18:21-35 The Rev. Linda Spiers
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – Sept 17, 2017 Trinity Episcopal Church

Yesterday I attended the 100th anniversary celebration at Camp Washington. There were all sorts of former and current campers, former and current counselors and staff, former and current camp directors. 150 or so of us were there for the main event that included a festive Holy Eucharist and delicious dinner. The end of the evening included a campfire with stories and songs. At dinner I sat with a woman who had been a camper 30 years ago. It was important for her to be back. Many returned because of the impact Camp Washington had on them—a camp that changes lives and a place that opens the doors for lifelong friendships and even some marriages! Two little girls of age 11 or so ran together with arms spread widely apart and then gave each other a long embrace to say farewell as their families were leaving last night. They were on the journey to lifelong friendship. In the Eucharist we sang a Camp song entitled “Nothing More” with these words.

To be humble

to be kind

It is a giving of the peace of your mind

to a stranger... to a friend

to give in such a way that has no end

we are love... we are one...

we are how we treat each other when the day is done

we are peace...we are war

we are how we treat each other and nothing more.

And to be bold...to be brave

it is the thinking that the heart can still be saved

and the darkness can come quick.

The danger's in the anger and in the hanging on to it
We are love...we are one
we are how we treat each other when the day is done
we are peace...we are war
we are how we treat each other and nothing more.

And tell me what it is that you see
a world that's full of endless possibilities
and heroes don't look like they used to
they look like you do.

We are love...we are one
we are how we treat each other when the day is done
we are peace...we are war
we are how we treat each other and nothing more.
We are how we treat each other and nothing more.
We are how we treat each other.¹

Hearing and singing this song made me think that this is the essence of how to live life—how we treat each other. It's at the heart of loving God and loving neighbor. There is a profound lesson of harm being done to another in Genesis when Joseph is open to forgiving what his brothers have done to him. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and his older brother Reuben was the only one who objected. The brothers were anxious and afraid of what Joseph would do to them. God brings reconciliation into this family. Joseph sees the good in his brothers,

¹ "Nothing More", The Alternate Routes, arr. Brian Rabuse.

despite their actions against him.

I read this week about reconciliation work that is going on in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—something called #DecolonizeLutheranism. It's a one-year reformation movement within the ECLA. A forum was recently held as part of the 2017 Central/Southern Illinois Synod Assembly.

#DecolonizeLutheranism began as a response to Dylann Roof, a member of an ECLA congregation. Dylann was the young man who killed prayer meeting members of Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015. #DecolonizeLutheranism is the work of actively reconciling the body of Christ. Together that synod gathering is doing the work of looking within at the way they treat one another and using Jesus' steps for forgiving the other.²

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus teaches about the power and importance of forgiveness. Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him—as many as seven times? Jesus says, “Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times.” (Matt 18:22). We are surrounded by situations that cry out for forgiveness—forgiving ourselves, forgiving those in our families, and forgiving the other, no matter who the other is. Depending on how we've been hurt, we often seek to respond with hurt. When we are able to forgive there is a freeing that happens. Forgiving doesn't mean forgetting or denying our hurt.

Peter's question invites us to think about those people in our lives that we

² Amy Zietlow, “Reflections on the Lectionary,” *Christian Century*, August 16, 2017, 21.

many need to forgive. His question may invite us to think about the ways we may need to forgive ourselves. There is a little “story of one prisoner of war who asked another, ‘Have you forgiven your captors yet?’

‘I will never do that,’ the second one answered.

‘Then they still have you in prison, don’t they?’ the first one replied.”³

When we are able to forgive there is a freeing that happens. Forgiving doesn’t mean forgetting or denying our hurt.

I wonder what would it be like if we held onto the words of that Camp Washington song. Kids teach us all the time.

“We are how we treat each other and nothing more.

We are how we treat each other.”

³ David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 72.