

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
FORGIVENESS RESTORES A RELATIONSHIP
Romans 13:8-10
September 4, 2011
10:00 A.M. SERVICE**

Jesus placed the initiative for seeking reconciliation on the person who was wronged. The tendency is to expect the wrong-doer to come full of apologies and seeking forgiveness. But Christ's way of restoring relationships is for the wronged person to come offering forgiveness.

Conflict is inevitable in our human situations. Hostilities can develop at every level of human relatedness. Too often issues are simply avoided as emotions continue to escalate. Anywhere and at anytime someone is willing to do what love demands, reconciliation is possible.

It is ironic, but we often treat those who are closest to us with less respect than we show strangers. Siblings can be far more cruel to each other than friends would be. Something about the ties of kinship lowers the bar of constraint that usually governs relationships. Christians sometimes treat other Christians in ways that betray Christ.

An expression of anger can cause a situation to escalate to a whole new level; even a level of rage. How should we deal with anger and resentment? When years get in the path of reconciliation, time can become very precious. It's so easy to grow apart. One's thoughts can turn to the dark side when there are misunderstandings and unmended fences that separated us and set up barriers. There are some families where relatives have not spoken for years. What a waste of precious time.

Reconciliation is at the heart of Christian faith. Paul writes in **II Corinthians 5:18**, *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through*

Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . .” That is who we are. We are a reconciling community. Christ has reconciled us with God. We, then, are to be reconciled with one another. So, if someone has something against us, or if someone has done something to us, rather than striking out in anger we are to go to that person and seek to be reconciled.

That can happen! Somebody can do, or say something dumb; then pride gets involved, and a relationship that could have worked out beautifully gets broken. But it is a beautiful thing to see a relationship restored.

Of course, for a relationship to be restored someone has to take the first step. Jesus says, *“If your brother or sister sins [against you], go and point out their fault, just between the two of you . . .”* Reconciliation is a serious business. Paul writes, *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . .”* It is because Christ reconciled us through his death on Calvary that we are able to take the first step to be reconciled with those who have hurt us. God took the first step to heal the rupture with humanity; now we are to take the first step in healing any ruptures in relationships with others.

History records a famous feud between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. The feud began when Jefferson defeated Adams in his bid for a second term as President. On the eve of his inauguration, Jefferson went to the White House to tell Adams he hoped they could still be friends. Before Jefferson could say a word, Adams began ranting, **“You have turned me out! You have turned me out!”**

For eleven years, they did not talk. Then some of Jefferson’s neighbors visited Adams. The old man burst out; **“I always loved Jefferson and I still love him.”**

The neighbors brought that message back to Jefferson, who urged a mutual friend to let Adams know of his **“affections.”** Adams responded with a letter, and so began a correspondence that is among the greatest in American history. The relationship was healed, but somebody had to take the first step.

Reconciliation is what Christian faith is all about. Who's going to take the first step? It will normally be the one who lives at the very depth of one's faith. Of course, some wrongs are so grievous that they can only be forgiven by the grace of God.

Last year at this time, we were hurting from the grievous actions of one person in our Children's Center. Children were hurt and families were angry and in pain. After almost a year, not a word of grace or apology was heard from the perpetrator. Even after the trial and sentencing, there was still silence. Parents and community sat in a courtroom and listened for a sign of grace. They were disappointed. They heard painful details of what become more and more difficult to endure. The trial ended and a 40 year sentence was handed down.

Our license was restored and our school is now operating again. We learned a painful lesson; and an expensive one as well. But we also learned about the support of a community. What a powerful difference it made.

Now comes the point of forgiveness. The reconciliation between this church and the perpetrator is a matter of divine intervention. Should he be forgiven for what he did? When forgiveness comes in this context, I believe it is the evidence of God at work.

All of us are tempted to strike back at anyone who offends us. All of us are tempted to hold on to resentments even to the point of allowing precious relationships to be severed. But what would Jesus have us do? It is clear that he would have us take the first step. Let's make this our Day of Reconciliation. After all, next Sunday is 9-11.

Human life is fraught with dangerous possibilities. The world is not an altogether safe place. From the time you arise in the morning until you retire at night you face potential hazards on every side. Even your teeth will bite your tongue! Sadly, many of our greatest threats come from each other, even members of our own families.

When asked, "*What is the greatest commandment?*" Jesus said there is one commandment by which we can fulfill all of religion's laws. Love God and

love your neighbor. In 1963, President Lyndon Johnson said to Congress: **“We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for a hundred years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter, and to write it in the books of law.”** He was right, but law will never do what love can do.

This is a place where we specialize in restoring relationships. If don't mind joining us, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.