

September 14, 2014 A Reservoir of Grace

I had family staying with me through Thursday, so I can tell you:

Family staying with you is such a great blessing.

To have significant conversations with people you love...

To eat together...To spend time together...To play games together...To do things together...To celebrate milestones...To reminisce...To catch up with what's going in peoples' lives...To see how people have grown...Such a blessing.

I had family staying with me this week, so I can tell you:

Family staying with you can be such a pain.

They don't wake up when you do...

They don't go to bed when you do...

They don't eat when you eat...

They don't eat what you eat...

They don't do things how you normally do things.

You have to go to the grocery store every day.

You have to do dishes many times a day.

All your usual routines are disrupted.

Did you know that a My Little Pony makes the perfect dog toy.

Your granddaughter is playing on the floor with all her little ponies around her.

One of the dogs comes trotting along...picks up one of the ponies...and trots away.

You were not expecting the blood-curdling scream that followed.

So you must perform an intervention.

Even the dogs are confused about what to do.

Family staying with you can be genuinely stressful.

Family staying with you can be such a pain.

I had family staying with me this week, so I can tell you this about family:  
forgiveness is required.

You speak words that harm.

You do actions that are not caring.

You miss important clues to what's going on in a person.

You step on each other's toes.

You inadvertently offend.

Forgiveness is a necessity in families.

In our Gospel story, we once again encounter Simon Peter.  
And Peter...he's like everyone else in your family.  
He tries to be faithful...but sinks into the water.  
He tries to understand Jesus and his ways...but Jesus has to tell him, "Get behind me, Satan."  
He tries to follow Jesus to the cross. He ends up denying him three times.  
And yet, Jesus chooses Peter for the unfolding of the kingdom.

Peter asks Jesus a question: How many times do I have to forgive when someone sins against me? As many as seven times?  
Notice this: Peter does not mention when he sins against other people.  
His question was about when people sin against him.  
I can picture Peter with a ledger...keeping track of other people's sins.  
Not his own sins, you understand...other people's sins.

If you are going to keep track of other people's sins, you are going to have to have a very big book.

I mean...if you spending time with family members causes you grief, and you love your family members, how much more is it a problem for everybody else.

But that's life with the ledger.

You will spend all your time keeping track.

You will be consumed by it.

You will never get past it.

Peter was a ledger person.

How many times do I have to forgive the sins of others?

What's the number, Jesus?

I want to give out the minimum forgiveness required and be done with it.

That's not how God works.

That's not what we find in Jesus.

He took Peter's question and blew it right out of the water.

Seven times? Oh, no. Seventy-seven times!

Like...forever.

Like...constantly.

Like...you commit yourself to it even before you get started.

Like...you live forgiveness as an overall attitude.

Then Jesus tells Peter a story...to bring the point home.

Whenever Jesus tells a story, you best pay attention...because something big is being announced.

On the surface, it's a story about a king and two servants.

But it does not really refer to particular individuals in the past.

At the deeper level of meaning, it's a story about God and you.

In the story, God is portrayed as exceedingly merciful.

He has great compassion on a servant in the house: you.

He forgives a debt that is massive: yours.

The Son Jesus is given to die on a cross for your forgiveness.

Most reasonable people wouldn't do it...but that's the nature of God.

After forgiving you such a great debt, God wants you to forgive others on the little things that cause offense.

God wants you to live in a spirit of forgiveness, and not keep track of everybody's sins against you.

God doesn't want you to live life as a ledger book.

God wants you to forgive because you have been forgiven.

Forgiveness is not just one more thing you do.

Forgiveness is not something that fits a ledger book...that you can check off when you complete it.

Forgiveness means living with a certain spirit...a gracious spirit.

Forgiveness means rooting your life in the deep reservoir of God's grace.

You forgive...because God has forgiven you so much more.

You forgive...because that's what it means to be gracious.

You forgive...because that's what brings wholeness to your relationships.

Forgiveness allows you to get past old hurts.

Forgiveness means healing.

Forgiveness sets you free.

Forgiveness releases you to move on to the things that have more value in life.

Forgiveness helps you to move toward the new life God intends for you.

Forgiveness means living in God's Spirit...by God's grace.

Forgiveness is a heavenly power to maintain health and wholeness in the world.

It all starts with God...and ends with you.

Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.