

I might be able to attribute some of it to my Norwegian heritage. The dark climes of my ancestors may have done something to shade my character. It doesn't take too many stressors before I am seeing the worst in just about every circumstance.

A dark turn of mind can move inward as well as outward. It seems we can disappoint ourselves and blame others at the same time. Such is human nature. Such is the need for salvation. Such is the call to the way of purification: letting go, crying out, inviting something new.

All the lines above paint a pleasant abstraction, but things got real in my house over the past few weeks.

It's a long story, but we were down to one car, requiring close coordination of schedules. Add in summer school, a whole round of summer kids camps and sports. Each day seemed to bring an email or text that ate up another bite of the summer calendar. We had taken one trip already, with a couple more on the books, and I already felt exhausted. I was still operating on the false assumption that summer was supposed to be restful.

I felt tired, frustrated, overwhelmed, overrun. I did what any good Christian husband would do. I blamed my wife? Not only did I blame her, I let it be known with a string of harsh and hurtful words, with a "hell of fire" heart.

Of course, I share this all as the opposite of a moral example. It speaks only to my own sin and need for forgiveness. Only two things prompt me to offer such a confession.

One: In Jesus alone, forgiveness is ready and waiting for every sin and sinner.

Two: I suspect I am not alone. We have been given to one another as members of the body of Christ to challenge, encourage, and correct one another.

My words and behavior didn't come out of nowhere. They came from the heart. After apologizing to Heather, I did some sifting and sorting to try and understand what gave rise to this outburst. Here was my opportunity to practice last week's spiritual discipline: confession and self-examination.

Here's what turned up: I have dwelt on some disappointment, I have held on to some bitterness, I have cultivated anger.

Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Here's what happened: I woke up the next day, made coffee, and set out with the dog. Something in the morning light and still-cool summer air called me to give thanks: for coffee, for the dog, for legs and lungs, for the bed I'd just risen from, the house I'd just left and would return to, for my wife, my kids, my job. In His glorious light, stirred by His Spirit, burden became blessing, obstacles— opportunities, trials— an opportunity to trust.

In this week's scripture, Jesus is calling us to this kind of work, to trace the line from our actions back to our heart. More directly, to consider our anger. And more

concretely and consequentially, to practice the type of forgiveness he has so freely offered us.

Small Group Direction

Matthew 5:21-26

21“‘You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’

- Here, the Torah and Jesus affirm the sanctity of life.
- How do we see the church proclaiming this message?
- Are there ways in which the church could offer a more compelling witness declaring life as of the highest value?

22But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

- Here Jesus moves from the deed (murder) to the heart that gives birth to such a crime: anger, hate, bitterness.
- All these emotions lead to the dehumanization of another. We categorize fellow image-bearers as something else, something less.
- Consider the following context where we might witness or experience this type of dehumanization. What ought our response look like?
 - Racism
 - Sexism
 - Politics

23So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

26Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

- The message here seems clear. Jesus prioritizes right relationships over religious rituals?
- How does this strike you...especially in light of the categories explored above.
- In what ways might we be called to the work of reconciliation?

This week’s Spiritual Discipline might be step one: forgiveness.

- Here is Adele Calhoun’s definition: *To forgive is to condemn a wrong, spare the wrongdoer hatred, revenge and self-righteous indignation by joining them to Jesus own forgiving heart.*
- Some scriptures to consider:

- Colossians 3:13
 - Ephesians 4:32
- What might forgiveness look like for you this week?