

## **Sermon Easter 3c 2022: Forgiveness is at the Very Heart of the Life of Faith**

### **Introduction: Do-Overs and Start -Overs**

One of the great gifts of life is the gift of a second chance;

    The gift of a second chance on something that's very important to you or me;

        Or the gift of a second chance with someone who is important to you or me.

It's a great and enlivening gift when we get that second chance;

    Or that opportunity to make things right after messing up or missing out the first time;

        We called them do-overs when we were kids;

            We call it forgiveness and grace when we become adults.

In my drives around the area this week, I noticed a lot of lacrosse and softball practices;

    It reminded me of the times when our three sons were playing sports;

        And the rushing around to get them to practice and to games;

            A much, much more organized form of play than when I was growing up.

Oh, we had organized sports with try outs and uniforms and games and referees and umpires;

    But most of our play was in the driveway or the back yard of one of our friend's homes;

        We played regular sports together on a pick-up basis;

    But we also made up games like street hockey on Lively Lane where we lived;

With a tennis ball as the puck and old tennis rackets or brooms as sticks.

When you're playing pick-up games or making up sports, there's a lot of conversation

    Over close plays, conversation or arguments over whether something was fair or foul;

        Or whether someone got a little rough with one of our friends;

            And if you couldn't come to an agreement about the play

                Or if it was really too close to call, we played that play again;

                    And the call was a "do-over".

A do-over is literally what it says it is, a chance to do the play over again;  
To throw another pitch, to take another shot; a second chance to get it right;  
It was a way to level the playing field and to keep the game going;  
To make it right or to make it as right as we could make them as kids;  
So the game could go on and we could remain friends.

Some of the idea of do-overs carries over into our adult lives, though not nearly as often;  
Business partners fight over money or a lost business opportunity or an outright failure;  
And have the choice of breaking the partnership and going separate ways;  
Or taking a do-over, they start again on a new page;  
And work through the problem for a way forward together.

A married couple loses their way, as most married couples do at some point;  
Something hasn't gone as planned, expectations weren't met;  
Work, children, life draw the couple in different directions;  
And the couple can break things off and separate, even divorce;  
Or one morning one of them wakes up and makes a decision  
That whatever the mistake or conflict or problem was;  
It's not powerful enough or important enough to break up the marriage;  
And they seek a reconciliation to return the marriage to an even place,  
Forgetting and forgiving whatever happened, so that they can start anew.

In our spiritual lives, there are ample opportunities to seek a do-over or a re-start;  
All of us fall short of the life that God has called us to live;  
We just got through the season of Lent and the minute after most of us start  
Some spiritual discipline we start thinking about not keeping it;  
St. Paul writes that I didn't even know about all the sins there were out there  
Until I started reading the law and saw all the ways I could sin.

We all fall short at different times in our lives, maybe we're even falling short right now;  
But when we come to ourselves, to use Jesus' words in the Prodigal Son story;  
When we turn, when we repent, when we seek to make a change toward God;  
We are always given a do-over or a second chance to start anew  
That's the kind of God we follow.

Do-overs and re-starts are a gracious part of life, as children and as adults;  
And when it comes to God, do-overs and second chances are at the very heart of God.

### **The God of Second Chances for a Purpose**

Among ourselves as children and as adults;  
There are times, not all the time, when we are given a do-over, given a second chance;  
But with God, there are always second chances;  
During Jesus' ministry when Peter asks whether we should forgive someone up to 7 times;  
And Jesus says, No, 7 times 70 or 490 times.

God is not like us, choosing to forgive or not to forgive, choosing to take a do-over or not;  
God is always ready and willing to forgive; it's God's nature;  
We fail and can fail again and again and God will always forgive.

Too many times we imagine that when we fail or stop paying attention to God  
That God will forget us and move on;  
But the whole of scripture and particularly the readings we heard this morning  
Speak to the God who not only forgives and offers us a next chance;  
But also speak to the God who in forgiving calls us to a higher purpose.

Consider Jesus' first followers in the Gospel reading this morning;  
Two times, the Risen Christ has paid them a visit;  
And one would think that the excitement of Jesus' resurrection and His presence

Would have compelled them to go and tell the Good News of God's grace and forgiveness  
But where do we find them? Fishing.

They've returned to their old lives, seemingly unchanged by Jesus' resurrection;  
But God's not done with them, you see;  
Jesus' resurrection promises forgiveness, that's true,  
But it also calls forth a new purpose for those who've been forgiven.

So Jesus comes to them by the Sea of Galilee and in one of the most poignant  
Moments of grace and a call to new life in the entire Bible;  
Jesus gives Peter a do-over and calls Peter to a different way of life.

Remember, Peter denied Jesus three times after Jesus' arrest;  
Denied that he even knew Jesus and Jesus gives Peter three chances to undo his denials;  
Three times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?"  
And three times Peter gets to even the score by saying,  
"Yes Lord, I love you, Yes Lord, you know I do."

And then we hear the difference between the forgiveness among ourselves  
And the forgiveness God offers, a forgiveness that comes with a new purpose  
Or a re-purposing as Jesus calls Peter to "Feed my sheep."

Forgiveness comes from God without our deserving it;  
And God's forgiveness comes with more than just evening the score or forgetting about it;  
God's forgiveness come with a repurposing;  
For not only is Peter forgiven, he has also been given a Godly task  
A new life that brings life to many, many people in his day and all the way down to us.

And even those of us who are living in opposition to God's call to a certain way of life;  
Those of us who don't pay much attention to God;  
Or even those of us who do hurtful things to others on a consistent basis;  
And wouldn't give someone a second chance for a million dollars;  
Are offered forgiveness and a new purpose in life by this gracious God of second chances.

Saul is killing Christians at the start of the Jesus movement;  
From being the coat check guy at the stoning of Stephen and arresting other followers;  
And is on his way this morning to kill some more;  
We don't find too many people in the Bible more opposed to the Jesus movement than Saul.

But look at the text. God doesn't kill Saul. God doesn't destroy Saul;  
And God doesn't just let Saul go along in life without Him either;  
He gives Saul a do-over, coming to Saul in a living, blinding vision;;  
Saul is forgiven and given a new purpose in life.

Saul goes on to Antioch, blinded and over a number of days is restored  
And given a new name, Paul, and a new objective in life, evangelist to the world;  
And leading others through the centuries to the love and grace of God  
And to God's new purposes for millions of Jesus' followers.

This God we pray to on our own, this God we worship on Sundays,  
This God who calls us to new life is the God of second chances and of new purposes.  
The God who has and will forgive you and me;  
And the God who has and will give us new purpose for our lives;  
And for the life of the world.

### **Forgiveness With a New Purpose**

On this Annual Meeting Sunday when we are celebrating all that God has done for us;  
May we remember that of the many gifts God has shared with us, we are forgiven.

We are forgiven so that we can start anew in our lives with God;  
We are forgiven and we are being given a purpose for our living;  
We are now called to forgive others, all others, just as God has;  
And we can start with the people closest to us and move on from there.

It's not enough that God would leave us in place where just forgiven;  
God is calling us, purposing us to live like Jesus  
Calling us to show and tell others of the great love and promise  
That we know and are coming to know ourselves;  
So that they too may know our God of second chances;  
And be changed to a new purpose for their lives and for the life of the world.

As this church on the mission of knowing God in Jesus Christ  
And making Christ known to others;  
Let me invite us all to know this God of forgiveness and second chances;  
And by the grace God's forgiveness brings;  
To receive God's forgiveness, offer forgiveness to others;  
And take up God's purposes for our lives  
And the life of the world.

Amen.