

## St. Peter and Forgiveness.

Over the past month in junior church we have been learning about St. Peter, about saying sorry and about forgiveness. And in today's reading, so beautifully read by Oliver, we hear Peter say "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" But Jesus didn't desert Peter, and he never deserts us, and he simply replied, "Don't be afraid; I will make you fishers of men."

As Christians we all know that forgiveness is part of the foundation of our faith.

So today we're going to look at what is possibly the ultimate test of forgiveness, which comes when somebody hurts you. How do you respond? Do you bear a grudge? Are you resentful are you bitter?

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians "Love – keeps no record of when it has been wronged." In other words, love doesn't store up hurt, it doesn't keep a grudge, or keep score.

The thing is with forgiveness, it isn't conditional. If you say to someone "I'll forgive you if..." that's not forgiveness, that's bargaining. Genuine forgiveness is given whether it's asked for or not.

And forgiveness is rarely a one-time event. It goes on and on and on. How often do I have to do this, to keep releasing my right to get even, to keep blessing those who do evil? Well until you stop feeling the hurt; then you'll know you've forgiven them. Peter thought he was being generous in offering to forgive seven times. But Jesus says, "Wrong! How about seventy times seven?" He's basically saying, "To infinity and beyond!" You just have to keep on forgiving.

After Jesus had shown Peter the power he had to help him catch loads of fish, Peter could see that there was something special about Jesus, and he didn't think that he was good enough to be with him.

But throughout his life, Jesus showed that by forgiving the bad things in Peter, he was able to use the good things about him to help other people. When Peter denied Jesus, he was deeply ashamed, but after his Resurrection, Jesus gave Peter the chance to make a new start, to show his love rather than his fear, and his courage rather than his cowardice. He forgave him.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask God to "forgive us our sins (trespasses) as we forgive those who sin against us." In forgiving each other for the wrong that we do, we can come to understand how God gives us another chance to get things right by forgiving us, too.

Peter understood this through the time that he came to spend with Jesus and the lessons that he learned from him, and he went on to teach others, and to become a great Christian leader – not because he was clever, or important, or rich, or even particularly good at fishing, but because he came to understand the importance of forgiveness in his life and because he had experience of living with Jesus by his side.

Over the past few months there has been a real message about kindness filtering throughout the world, so maybe in a world where we can choose how we behave towards others, maybe, just maybe we can all choose to be kinder and more forgiving, and enable others to show their good side by not always reminding them of their bad behaviour. And they can do the same for us.

Amen