

Reading: Matthew 5:38-48

On Monday I found myself adviser to a friend with his Sky TV. It was only getting one channel and that channel was Duke which is pretty lame. When I say adviser, I saw myself as responsible for drinking the cups of tea and eating the Belgium biscuits. In the end it turned out that on the side of the sky box is a little door and behind the wee door is a button. This is the reset button. Pushing this button resets the machine to its factory settings while keeping its memory of stored programs. Wouldn't it be good, I thought to myself, if we had a reset button too? To start over, to put behind us all the hurts that have built up over the years.

Jesus in our Gospel today is proposing just that, a reset button when others hurt us. The Jewish law outlined in Exodus was an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. To be sure, this was a vast improvement on the revenge practices of the neighbouring tribes. But the problem was, as Martin Luther King the black rights campaigner pointed out, if we take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth eventually the whole world ends up blind and in need of false teeth.

There must be a better way. In verse 43 Jesus outlines his plan for a better way. "You have heard others say love your neighbour and hate your enemy, but I say love your enemies and pray for those who hurt you."

Jesus' new way, Jesus' reset button, is forgiveness. This forgiveness sounds alright in theory but doesn't justice demand revenge, or at least payback? After all, don't we feel better if we can get even?

Debbie Morris had a normal childhood growing up in small town USA but that all changed when she was 16. The night began well enough with a date

with her high school sweetheart. What followed was a nightmare. A random stranger appeared with a gun, shot her boyfriend in front of her, raped her, brutalised her for 12 hours and left her for dead under a tree. It didn't take long for police to find her attacker. He was charged and put on death row. Debbie's state had the death penalty. The 1996 movie *Dead Man Walking* was made about this crime. For years the death of her tormentor felt like justice and Debbie waited with great expectation for the moment her rapist was to be put to death by electrocution. The day came and she expected some sort of release, but strangely she felt no better. In fact, she began to feel worse. She suffered from depression and nothing would seem to help. About five years later while she was praying, she realised that in order for her to move on she needed to forgive the man. He had completely ruined her life but as long as she played the victim, as long as she was unforgiving, he still had power over her. In a moment of blinding realisation, she knew that he could have been put to death 500 times and it would never help her. What she needed was to push the reset button. What she needed was forgiveness. Debbie recounted how hard it was to embark on that journey of forgiveness. Her family and friends urged her otherwise. But the more she forgave, the more she set herself free. She discovered that forgiveness was the key to liberating her own life. By God's grace she has completely forgiven the man and today she tours the United States teaching others about the power of Christian forgiveness. If you ask Debbie "Was it an easy journey?" her answer is an emphatic no! If you ask, "Was it a necessary one?" she would say an equally emphatic yes.

I wonder what hurts you have absorbed over the years. It may not be as terrible as Debbie's, but they do build up. The point of Christian forgiveness is not that we forgive and forget. How could Debbie forget that night? The reset button on the Sky decoder keeps its memory, and so do we. The point of Christian forgiveness is not that we just become doormats for others to walk over. The point of Christian forgiveness is not that it happens overnight. Reconciliation is a long process. The point of Christian forgiveness is that it holds the key for our liberation. In order to enjoy life again, we need God's reset button.

But there is one person who in my experience is the most difficult to forgive. We have such high expectations of this person. They seem to be doing really well and then they say or do something which is just plain dumb. And most annoying of all this person is always with us. I refer of course to ... ourselves. We need to grow in the grace of being gentle and forgiving with ourselves. Jesus is more ready to forgive us than we are to forgive ourselves.

One night an old priest was praying. And to her amazement an angel appeared before her. "I am an angel of the Lord with a message for you." the angel said. The priest was disbelieving. "You are just a figment of my imagination," she said. "Ask me anything," said the angel, "and I will prove to you I am from God." "Okay," said the priest. "When I was young, I did the most terrible thing, I have never forgiven myself for it. If you are from God go and ask God what it was I did. Then I will believe you are an angel." The next night she was praying and again the angel appeared. "Well angel," said the old woman, "Did you ask God what I did?" "Yes," said the angel. "I asked God, but God has forgotten." God has forgotten.

Jesus knew that our ability to forgive others is linked to how well we know we are forgiven. That's why he taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." When we push the reset button on another's sins then God can work to reset ours. And this, my friends, is grace.