

“Leave you baggage on the luggage carousel” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
December 30, 2018, First Sunday After Christmas Day
Colossians 3:12-17

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

The holidays. What an enjoyable time – visiting family and friends. Enjoying good food and good conversation. But --- in our big country with families living far apart, most people have to travel a good distance to enjoy family and friends. Rarely is it over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house you go! No, it’s Uber to the airport – or talk a friend into taking you - and then checking in and waiting for your flight. Once you arrive at your destination, it’s time to deplane and join the throng at the luggage carousel to wait for your luggage.

Have you ever stood there waiting for your luggage and it didn’t arrive? I used to travel a lot for work and too many times my luggage didn’t arrive when I arrived. Of course, most of the time the luggage is delivered later so it’s really not lost luggage. As much as I traveled, I’ve never truly lost my luggage. But it’s annoying and an inconvenience when you have to wait a day or two for your luggage to catch up to where you are staying. I learned to always carry with me all the important papers that I needed as well as a change of underclothes and a clean white shirt. If the airline lost my luggage, I could get dressed the next morning and make my presentation.

The new year is coming. Many of us look to the new year as a chance to make a fresh start, to leave last year’s issues and problems behind and start over. Perhaps the fresh start some of us may want or need to make this year is to lose some of the luggage, or rather baggage, that you’ve been carrying around all year. You and I just may need to permanently lose some baggage that we’ve been carrying around far too long.

Do the grudges you carry put you over the weight limit for your suitcase?
Does your carry-on contain loads of resentments?
Is your roller bag packed with revenge?

Not many of us consider the load we have already packed, that travels with us every day. Probably the worst thing we can do is take these bags bulging with old grudges, unforgiven acts and other negative thoughts into the new year.

What does ‘lost luggage’ and our baggage have to do with Paul’s letter to the Colossians? A lot! In this letter Paul tells the Colossians and those of us sitting here today how to live as Christ-followers. We are to shed that baggage we’ve been carrying around all year – or maybe longer. We are to clothe ourselves **with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience**. These are behaviors of a Christ-follower. Just as ill-fitting clothing detracts from the individual’s appearance so also ill-fitting behaviors detract from the image of Christ in each of us.

And Paul goes on to explain what may be difficult behavior for many of us. Paul counsels: **forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.**

Forgive those who have hurt you, insulted you? Paul doesn’t make forgiveness optional. Note the words, **so you must forgive**. As Christ-followers we don’t forgive someone just to be nice or because it promotes peace in the family or the church. Paul is quite bluntly making the connection between divine forgiveness and human acts of forgiveness. We are to forgive because God has forgiven us.

Don't be like James Thurber's grandfather. It is one thing to lose the baggage of bitterness and forgive. It is another thing to do it like the grandfather of James Thurber. It was reported that when he was on his deathbed, Thurber's grandfather was asked by his minister, "Have you forgiven all your enemies?" "Haven't got any," said the old man. "Remarkable!" the minister said. "But how did a red-blooded, two-fisted old battler like you go through life without making any enemies?" Grandfather Thurber explained casually: "I shot 'em."

Paul's stipulation that we are to forgive shouldn't be viewed as another rule or law that we need to keep. Forgiveness is not something that we, as Christ-followers, owe each other or something that we gift another person with. We have the capacity to forgive only because God has first forgiven us. If we have not experienced God's forgiveness in our lives, we don't have anything to truly offer others. When we acknowledge God's forgiveness in our lives, we can then extend this divine act of forgiveness to others.

This is difficult for many of people in our me-centered society to understand. But it is God who forgives and that forgiveness flows through us and fills us with a forgiving spirit. We must depend on God to take our baggage and send it to a destination where we will never find it again. In our weekly worship we have confession and forgiveness. That part of our worship is to remind us that God forgives us, and, because of that, we can forgive others.

Perhaps this will help. Forgiveness is not forgetting; rather, it is choosing not to actively remember. Forgiveness is not saying to the other party: "You're okay." Rather, it is saying, "I'm okay, and I am willing to let God deal with whether you're okay; and if you're not, how you can become okay." Forgiveness is not saying, "I don't feel the pain anymore." Rather, it is saying, "I do not feel the need to hold on to your involvement in my pain anymore." (Homiletics, "The perfect time to lose our luggage" viewed 12/27/18)

Terry Anderson, a hostage in Lebanon for seven years, tells in his book *Den of Lions*, "Forgiveness doesn't have anything to do with one's enemies," he says. "Forgiveness doesn't mean there isn't any anger, but is rather, letting go of that anger. If you hold on to the anger, you only hurt yourself, family and friends." He also relates in his book that his journey toward forgiveness did not start after he was released, but while he was still a hostage.

Let's consider one more lens to look through as we examine this idea of divine forgiveness and how it affects our behavior – how it flows through us to others in our lives. Paul writes in verse 17: **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** Paul tells us that we are to do everything in the name of Jesus. Consider that it just may be a bit difficult to spread malicious gossip about someone in the name of Jesus. It may just give you pause when you make plans to get even with a liar or you plan to cheat in the name of Jesus. Can you hate someone in the name of Jesus?

As the new year begins, I hope Paul's words to the Colossians will enable you to leave those grudges that put you over the weight limit for your suitcase and that carry-on that contains loads of resentments and that roller bag packed with revenge – leave them all on the luggage carousel never to see them again. Let them truly be lost luggage, lost baggage.

If any have trouble with forgiveness, perhaps printing out these verses and putting them on your mirror to read each morning would be a good thing. Remember: **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**