

Albany Presbyterian Church 23rd February 2025

Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher renowned for his concept of deconstruction Philosophy, which aimed to comprehend literary and philosophical works and political institutions by deconstructing and analyzing them. He gained considerable popularity in the early 2000s, participating in numerous forums and lectures, appearing in the media, and speaking across various countries. Around 2001, he wrote a book titled "On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness." I have seen one of the interviews in which he explained his work on forgiveness, which caused a lot of reactions.

He said, "Pure forgiveness is impossible, and no one can genuinely forgive what is unforgivable. One forgives what can be easily forgiven, but true forgiveness eludes us. One must forgive what is unforgivable, achieving the impossible. A distinction needs to be made between reconciliation and forgiveness. Forgiveness demanded or given to achieve some reconciliation is not true forgiveness. If I forgive solely to change a situation or heal a wound, or if I forgive with a therapeutic intention or a psychoanalytic or ecological purpose so that someone's health returns or peace is restored, then to me, that is not forgiveness; that is calculation. While I might consider such a calculation necessary, I would not regard it as pure forgiveness. I would see it as part of a process of mourning or reconciliation, which is sometimes therapeutic or politically necessary. I approve of all these reconciliation processes attempted in many parts of the world today. However, as a philosopher who tries to be rigorous with what is said and aims to understand the meaning of words and evaluate their sense and implications, he said I refrain from calling these situations examples, pure forgiveness."

<https://youtu.be/dwDZ6jrDgdg?si=V3aMRBvcWlqknWup>

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Reflecting on this passage in Luke 6, I thought about what Derrida said, and surprisingly, he helps us to understand what Jesus said in Luke 6. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not prevent him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back."

Sounds impossible...

Instead, we love those who love us back, we do good to those who are good to us, and if we lend someone something, we expect them to pay us back. As Jesus says in verse 31, it makes sense to "Do to others as we would have them to do us." And we expect them to do the same. Easy... makes sense.

But Jesus says no... love your enemy, do good to those who hate you, and lend them money without expecting it back. Do the complete opposite of what your enemies do to you.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is one of the most respected people on the subject, speaks about forgiveness.

<https://youtu.be/uo2LGGqtjqM?si=LIFpg93aSPB6DYnG>

What did you hear him saying?

Forgiveness cannot be transactional. It is not offered to gain something in return or even ease your pain. Forgiveness is not just a virtue but a commandment that Jesus has instructed us to follow. As Derrida also says, pure forgiveness cannot be transactional. It is merely a calculation if we expect something in return.

"If you love those who love you, what good is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what good is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what good is that to you? Even sinners lend to others, expecting to be paid back in full. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, lend expecting nothing in return.

It is a bad economy. We might think that by doing this, we are contributing to a society that passively reacts to hate, violence, crime, and abuse, thereby perpetuating further harm. However, this represents a more radical approach to breaking the cycle of violence, hate, crime, and abuse because, as Desmond Tutu states, it is the path of Christ, the way of

¹ Watch the first 5.6 minutes of the Video on this YouTube.

Also, note that Derrida came to New Zealand and talked in Auckland Town Hall in June 25th 2000. He reply to someone who asked so who can truly forgive, was "if God exist, though I don't claim to be a believer, God."

God. By forgiving but loving our enemies, doing good to those who hurt us, and being generous without expecting anything in return, we are becoming sons and daughters of God, who is source of all life and love and all things.

As an example, consider Joseph... in Genesis 45, how Joseph responded to his brothers, who hated him, were violent toward him, and sold him into slavery in Egypt. He did not hold a grudge or seek revenge. Instead, he viewed the situation from a faith perspective, recognizing that it was God who allowed all the hardships he faced at the hands of his brothers so he could become the person he was—the one in charge of Pharaoh's treasury—enabling the people of Judah to survive and thrive through the harsh circumstances of drought and famine.

He said in verse 5, “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.” In verse 7, “God sent me ahead of you to preserve a remnant on earth for you and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler, of all Egypt.”

In a sense, Joseph achieved the unimaginable. Forgiveness that is impossible.. He had sincere and genuine faith and trust in God, who was with him everywhere and every time.

We live in an extraordinary time. Enemies—Eckros, which Luke uses in the passage from chapter 6, refers to those who harbor hostility toward us—that it seems enemies are everywhere. Race, gender, social and economic status, migrants, the poor, and marginalized individuals are not only ignored but also ostracized. Terrible stories unfold of children bullied in school simply because they come from migrant families. Conflicts and violence from a various regions around the globe, including Ukraine, Israel, and Palestine, and other parts of the world now, are dominating our news daily. Many seem trapped in a scarcity mindset, believing they have limited resources and no capacity to give or allow others to engage in their world. We begin to judge and condemn others, creating barriers to protect and preserve ourselves. This mindset carries a fear of running out. It feels like a plague that surrounds us, even within the church. Holding such a mentality, we leave no space in our lives for those who despise us, are hostile, abusive, or selfish. We cannot reasonably believe that loving our enemies reflects a healthy economy of God.

A while ago, I shared my time and experiences in Zambia. While I was with a congregation in Mfuwe, in southern Zambia, I joined a group of women who worked quietly to help the poor, especially those suffering from HIV AIDS and living in villages hidden out of fear of being discovered by others. As you can imagine, they were impoverished and barely had enough to eat or feed their children. Yet, they contributed portions of flour, oil, vegetables, money they could spare, and any medicine they had. They visited these people's homes in groups, not asking questions but simply praying for them and helping wherever they could. They are the most generous and nonjudgmental people of faith I have ever met. They lived in abundance.

Yes, it seems impossible to truly forgive. That is why Derrida says no one can truly forgive except God. Coming from someone who does not believe in God. This was a great shock.

But not for us. This is why God came in Jesus to die and rise from the dead. In doing so, He has truly forgiven us through Christ Jesus; Christ has done the impossible so that we may have a new life in the abundance of God. God is all about abundance. The people of God and the followers of Jesus should live in abundance, within the spacious love of God. From the wellsprings of His mercy and grace, God calls us to love our enemies, do good to those who hurt us, and be generous without expecting anything in return. So Jesus says in verse 38, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. The measure you use will be measured to you.”

Pray that we see God's bigness of God, which is bigger than all our vastness of generosity and love combined. Pray that God will help us to live in that bigness, in his abundance so we can love as we are loved and forgive as we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.