PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon on Forgiveness

Preaching notes on forgiveness, including the three-way distinction between forgiveness, reconciliation and safety that must be made out loud in any congregation, because a sermon that blurs them can do serious harm to someone who is being hurt right now.

topic notes · 4 segments

Topic notes. Movement two is not optional. Preaching this subject without it is genuinely dangerous.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Statistically, someone hearing this sermon is being abused by a person they will see this week. Anything you say that implies forgiveness requires returning to a dangerous situation will be heard by them as instruction from God. Make the distinction in movement two explicitly.
- Do not use an example of forgiving something trivial and then apply it to something grave. The move is noticed and it undermines everything after it.

01. Three texts, three costs

choose one

[Genesis 50 is the underused one]

Matthew 18:21-35. Seventy times seven and the unforgiving servant. The parable's ending is harsh and preachers routinely soften it; the harshness is doing work and should be left in.

Luke 23:34. Father forgive them, said from the cross, about people in the act of killing him. Short, and it removes any argument that forgiveness is for small things.

Genesis 50:15-21. Joseph and his brothers, decades later, and notice that he weeps when they approach. Forgiveness in this passage is not a single moment but something arrived at across twenty years and several false starts, which is closer to most people's experience.

02. Three things that are not the same

say this out loud

[the pastorally essential movement]

Forgiveness is releasing your claim against someone. Reconciliation is the restoration of a relationship, and it takes two people. Safety is whether it is wise for you to be near them.

The first can happen without the second. The second should never be required without the third. A person can forgive completely and still be right never to be alone with someone again, and if you do not say that sentence in the sermon, someone will assume the opposite.

03. The trap

avoid this

[speed]

Preaching forgiveness as a decision made once, quickly, and then finished. For anything serious it is a decision made repeatedly over years, and someone who has to make it again next Tuesday should not conclude that the first time did not count.

04. An angle worth taking

if you want it

[the debt, in actual numbers]

The two debts in Matthew 18 are not close. One is an amount an ordinary worker could repay in a few months. The other is a sum so large it is comic, more than the annual revenue of a province. The parable is built on an absurd ratio and preaching the numbers plainly makes the point better than any application.

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