

*Searching for...Forgiveness*

Psalm 4, Acts 3:12-19, 1 John 3:1-7

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I am honored to be here, and I am sincerely grateful that *you* are here also. If you came today expecting to see and hear the amazing Rev. Dr. Donna Claycomb Sokol, I get it. I too love listening to her sermons. I listen repeatedly. Thank you for being here, for listening, and for participating!

On Friday, I was able to hear the New York Times best selling author, Anne Lamott, and Lamott said of herself, "I have the theological understanding of a bright second grader." After finishing my second semester at Duke Divinity School, that quote deeply resonated with me.

This is my fourth time ever delivering a message and my second at MVP. I remember the wise words of Pastor Donna about being nervous to speak here because she is so fantastic and just all that being "the DCS" entails, and this is new, different, scary and vulnerable. I said to the DCS, "I want to be like you." She says, "Don't try to be like anyone else or me, just be you." "Remember your core." I really didn't even know what that meant in August. I think I know a little bit more now, though.

I must admit that any person in seminary would want to be like her - intelligent, inspiring, a trailblazer, a visionary, a doer, an encourager, and she has that superpower to see right through your eyes to your soul. When she asks, "How are you, and you say, "Ok" She responds with, "What does that mean?" Not to mention have you seen her OrangeTheory times in rowing. I checked... 2000 meters (that's 1.24 miles) The DCS could row from here to South Africa. Also, I can't pronounce the words like she does. I had speech class in elementary school for my "Ssss". If I tried those words, it would sound like I was speaking parseltongue.

Also, I worried about my Southern accent until I saw Kimberly's FaceBook post about her beloved mother's southern accent long after she left the south, and now, when she hears a southern accent she thinks of her mom. Kimberly, I got you today. Mama's gonna be well-represented. We do speak differently in the foothills of North Carolina. However, during my Easter visit, I did manage to say, "return the shopping cart instead of take back the buggy." The last thing I have learned so far is that I was also trying too hard to sound preacherly. It's easy for me to sound teacherly. I did that for 30 years. A former student told me, "Your

messages are good, but you sound so serious now." I'm like, it's about GOD! I decided this week that I am most comfortable being myself, and if that's slightly more teacherly than preacherly, so be it.

Now, let's get started.

It is Easter Season in the church. Does anyone know another 21st century meaning for the term Easter egg? Today, while I am not dropping any *Reputation* Easter eggs in the sermon, you will get some Easter eggs to a different song if you listen carefully. I am going to ask you to sing a little bit of this song at the end, and if you don't understand what any of that means... find a younger adult to ask near the end of the service. There is no penalty for getting it wrong. Today's sermon is about forgiveness after all.

This sermon series is called "*Searching for.... Last week was what? Searching for Closeness....*

Today, we are moving to "*Searching for ...Forgiveness.*"

Your first opportunity to participate is by naming the singer/ musician whose real name is Reginald Dwight. He wrote and sang the song ... pause to let people guess the musician. "*Sorry seems to be the hardest Word.*" I believe that is true.

Personally, I feel like I search for a lot of things. Today, I am specifically speaking about forgiveness. Whether you need to give it, receive it, believe it, or encourage someone else to be more forgiving. Forgiveness, I know "***We can't hold it back anymore.***"<sup>1</sup>

Also, to prepare for this message, I created a survey about forgiveness and shared it on social media. I asked four simple questions or statements, and I received around 350 responses.

1. Do you forgive easily? 64% of the people said yes.
2. I used to be \_\_\_\_\_ forgiving (more, less, the same). (44% said they used to be less forgiving, 29% said they used to be more forgiving, 26% no change in their forgiveness level).
3. It's more challenging to forgive myself than someone else? 83% said it's harder to forgive yourself.
4. There is one person (at least) that I have not been able to forgive? 61% said they have at least one person that can't forgive.

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<sup>1</sup>Lyrics.com, STANDS4 LLC, 2024. "**Let It Go Lyrics.**" October 21, 2013, Track 5 Frozen Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, 2013.

What makes me think *I* am qualified to speak about forgiveness? Honestly, I used to find it impossible to forgive. I am going to blame my former inability to forgive on two things. 1. I have a better than average memory. I have a tendency to remember what was said, how it was said, where it was said, where one sat, and what song was playing on the radio at the time. 2. And, this is also what Anne Lamott said about her difficulty to forgive- I did not love myself. I didn't think I was beloved by God; I was broken by so many things from the past; **"Conceal don't feel. Don't let them in."**<sup>2</sup> I never imagined that God could love me, but thanks to the DCS and this congregation, I started to believe it. For me, the more I like/love myself and believe I am a beloved child of God - the more I can believe that other people are children of God and beloved, and they also deserve to be forgiven.

The scriptures from the lectionary really spoke to me today. One of our texts this week is Psalm 4. In her commentary on Psalm 4, Nancy Koester tells us that it is "good for what ails us."<sup>3</sup> I see forgiveness in these scriptures. To me, Psalm 4, which has a superscription in my study Bible of "Confident Plea for Deliverance from Enemies."<sup>4</sup> Confident Plea... verse 3 says "But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him" (Pss 4:3 NRSVUE). Another verse that speaks to me about forgiveness is "When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds and be silent Selah" (Pss 4:4 NRSVUE).

One strategy that has helped me with forgiveness has been that I was introduced to the author, Dr. Thais Gibson, by Megan, one of my Duke Divinity classmates. In Thais Gibson's book *Learning Love*, Gibson says we have attachment wounds from childhood... like fear of failure, fear of not achieving enough, fear of not being loved, fear of abandonment, fear of not being enough, etc. Our wounds create an attachment style<sup>5</sup>. And then, Gibson teaches you that you can change the way you are affected by this wound by retraining your subconscious mind. Your subconscious mind accounts for 95-97% of what and how we feel, act, and believe. The good news is that we can retrain it!<sup>6</sup> **"We can test the limits and break through."**<sup>7</sup> How can we do this - by imagery/emotion and repetition. I also think this theory can help us learn to forgive other people. When you start to increase your belief in your belovedness. You will start to recognize that this person who maybe has wronged you, or you have wronged is beloved also and that they are not out to make your life miserable. It may seem like it's their goal, but it's

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<sup>2</sup>"Let It Go Lyrics." October 21, 2013, Track 5 Frozen Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, 2013.

<sup>3</sup>Nancy Koester, "Commentary on Psalm 4," workingpreacher.org, April 15, 2018, April 11, 2024.

<sup>4</sup>Attridge, Harold W. 2006. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: Fully Revised with Concordance*. New York, NY: HarperOne.

<sup>5</sup> Thais Gibson, *Learning Love: Building the Best Relationships of Your Life Using the Integrated Attachment Theory* (Personal Development School, 2023), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Gibson, *Learning Love*, 26-30.

<sup>7</sup> "Let It Go Lyrics." October 21, 2013

not. We must really stop and recognize how our own faults factor into this equation and remember ***“How some distance makes everything so small.”***<sup>8</sup>

In Acts 3:12-19 - we have a lot to ponder and learn, but we must be careful. This particular passage has been used by many Christians to persecute Jews. Peter reminds the Jews that they are the ones who had Christ put to death, but Peter also reminds them that they acted in ignorance and need to now repent (Acts 3: Maya Angelou said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.” Verse 19 of this Acts passage says, “Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out” (Acts 3:19 NRSVUE). Repent is a good word that gets a bad wrap. When I used to think of the word repent, I thought of shame or regret, but the literal meaning of the Hebrew word repent is *teshuvah* (*chew- va*) which means return as if turning back to something you’ve strayed from - turn back to God with your whole heart.<sup>9</sup> When we turn back to God, we turn back to love.

And finally, 1 John 3:1-7 NRSVUE. Truly, these verses are my new favorite lines of scripture.

1. See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.
2. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.
3. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Verse 1 **“See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1 NRSVUE).**

Release the animosity and hard feelings towards other people.

Repetition and imagery/emotion... Close your eyes. My online community, You are invited to close your eyes. Are there people in this room that you love? Think of that love that God has given. Think of them. Are there people you love that are not physically present with you? Think of that love that God has given. Picture them. Think of them. **“See what love God has given us” (1 John 3:1).** Are there people who poured into you and who helped form your faith whether they are alive or they have left this earthly realm? Picture them. Repeat their name in your mind. Think of that love that God has given. **“See what love God has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1).**

Repetition and Imagery/Emotion.

Open your eyes.

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<sup>8</sup> "Let It Go Lyrics." October 21, 2013

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7jymi35MDg>

Friends, life is short. As Anne Lamott said when I asked her this question about forgiveness on Friday night, “We are on borrowed time. We don’t want to waste our time on meaningless disagreements (actually she said meaningless BS). She said, “When we can’t forgive, it creates toxic sacks that weigh us down.” Imagine we are in an airplane, everytime we forgive, we throw those toxic sacks out the window, and we get lighter, and we climb higher.” (Lamott, April 12, 2024, Washington, DC).

**“See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1).**

So, how do we turn back to God...it’s the name of the song.

And the name of the song?

Let It Go... written by Robert and Kristen Anderson Lopez ... from the 2013 movie Frozen (released in January 2014)

Play song clip... last 10 seconds.

Repetition and Imagery/Emotion

**“See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1).**

The other stuff...Let it go!

Amen and amen!