Martha and I have been married for about 5 and a half years. In those 5 years we have moved 5 times. We moved to Kansas for vicarage and in Kansas we had the opportunity to get fiber wireless internet through google. It was awesome! If it went out they would refund you for however long it was out. But it rarely went out because it was very reliable. If only I could say the same about spectrum…

Upon leaving Kansas we were instructed to return the wifi equipment to the google store. The only problem was that we were in the middle of covid shutdowns and the store wasn’t open. There was a mailing process but it was not the most intuitive and we were very busy packing so I decided I would mail it from St. Louis. The box got packed away, we got back to St. Louis, and I never returned the equipment and I don’t remember if we lost a deposit or if we were charged it but somehow we lost $200.

For some reason, I have been unable to get rid of that darn google box. So I have packed it up and taken it on every move since Kansas and at this moment it is sitting in a box, somewhere in our basement. Sitting there as a memento of my failure and the 200 dollars that I lost. For some reason I just can’t let it go and throw it away.

Many people carry around something just as useless as an out of date wifi router. They carry around anger and a grudge against someone else. Maybe this is you, has someone sinned against you who you have not forgiven? Are you holding any grudges? Adam and Eve’s downfall was their pride and we are no better. We are proud. We don’t like to be sinned against, to be treated as less than. We want the respect and the honor that we feel we are due.

Is there someone in your life that you are withholding forgiveness from? If so I have some bad news for you. In your withholding of forgiveness, you are now the one who needs forgiving. Jesus is very clear that we are to forgive our neighbor not 7 but 70 times 7 times, or in other words, always. Yet still many of us walk around holding onto the sin of other people.

Don’t get me wrong, in no way am I trying to minimize the sin of others. You may have been grievously sinned against. Your trust may have been violated, you may have been physically or emotionally harmed, your name may have been dragged through the mud, someone may have just been downright cruel to you. In no way am I saying that what they did was okay. What I am saying is that no matter the harm or the hurt, you have to forgive them.

The more you read the bible the more you may find yourself thinking the words, “that isn’t fair.” Your right it doesn’t seem fair does it? Someone else sins against you and now they have dragged you into sin as well. Why should what they do affect me? Sin is a lot like a virus, it spreads quickly, infecting anything that it touches. One sin can easily lead to many other sins.

Again I think pride is a huge reason that people are unable to forgive each other. I think that we feel that if we forgive someone it lessens what that person did. We think that if we forgive someone we make it seem like what that person did didn’t really bother us, we make it seem like it’s really no big deal. We think that by holding onto our anger and resentment we are able to hold onto our self-importance.

Dear Christians today I am telling you to let go of your grudges and your anger and your resentment and forgive your neighbor whether they ask for that forgiveness or not. Whether they know they have sinned or not. Whether they are alive or dead, you must forgive them. Stop carrying it around because it is more than just useless, it is dangerous. The wait of your grudges is drowning you, it is pulling you deeper and deeper into more sin. Sin begets sin. Unrepentant sin and unforgiveness will just lead a person into more sin.

In our reading for today Jesus has appeared in the midst of his disciples. Notice the first thing that he says to them “peace be with you.” Why would Jesus feel the need to say that? Two reasons, first he had appeared out of nothing in-front of them after dying on the cross, second how was their last interaction? The disciples had almost all abandoned him when he was arrested and crucified. They had to have remembered all the times he warned them about falling away and now he was back after they had fallen away. But Jesus doesn’t hold a grudge against their unfaithfulness. He forgives them, he takes away the terror and the angst they were feeling and he forgives them.

A relationship in which forgiveness is withheld is not a relationship at peace. Jesus’ death and resurrection has won for all mankind peace with God. Because of his sacrifice on the cross our sins have been forgiven. In-fact the sins of the whole world were forgiven on the cross. It doesn’t matter if a person is repentant or not, their sins are forgiven. That forgiveness however is only extended to those who are repentant.

As a Christian we are called to do the same for those around us. We forgive before a person even before they apologize, even before they repent, because that is what Christ did for us. As St. Paul says in Romans chapter 5 “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus forgives his disciples for their sins against him and in the same reading he gives his power of forgiveness to his disciples and to his church. We are called to forgive our neighbor for the sins he has committed against us so that we are not dragged into sin as well.

There are many people walking around our world holding onto their sins. Some are public sins and some are private. The church has been given a great gift which we call the office of the keys, the ability to forgive and to not forgive sins. Much of what we have talked about so far has been focused on forgiving our neighbor for sins they have committed against us. Where the office of keys comes in is primarily when we are dealing with sins which have not been committed against us but really the focus is on public sin.

If we are to call ourselves church then we must exercise this power of forgiving and retaining sins. There are many people traveling around our world today carrying their sins. Some hold the close to their chest and hide them, other wave them around and showing them off for the world to see.

Sin begets sin, public sin begets more public sin. Gossip, slander, cohabitation, pre-marital sex, active homosexual lifestyles, sexual assault, abuse, and many other things are public sins which drag down not only a person but an entire church. As the church this is why we practice public and private church discipline. It’s why we hold people back from the altar of the Lord and it is why we excommunicate the open and unrepentant sinner. Not because we have a personal grudge against them but because their sin. We do not excommunicate people because we are mad at them but instead because we love them.

Because we want them to understand the severity and the weight of the sin they are carrying around. The sin they are carrying around will drag them right into hell. The goal of church discipline is to convince them to set their sins aside and lay them at the foot of the cross before they are overcome.

That is what God calls all of us to do, to let go of the sin that we cling to so tightly, to let go of our grudges and our anger and our hate and our pride or whatever else we can’t seem to stop carrying around with us. God calls us to let repent, to let go of our sin, and to pick up instead his cross, his burden, his forgiveness.

That is the other part of the office of the Keys, not only to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant but to give it to anyone who repents. That is what you have called me and Pr. Groth here to do. To forgive your sins, to stand before you in the service or anywhere else that you find your guilt overcoming you and to forgive you.

To stand before you in the place of Christ and to tell you “peace be with you” your sins are forgiven, your debt has been paid, the blood of Jesus has washed you and mad you clean. To extend to you the forgiveness that was yours before you even repented, the forgiveness that was won for you on the cross.