

## **God keeps no records**

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on the Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 6, 2010.

*I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it.* Galatians 1:13

Paul is a very proud man. While he values humility he more than once manages to remind us of his humility! To his credit, he readily admits that he was wrong when he was persecuting Christians. He was headed in the wrong direction when he persecuted the followers of Jesus because they threatened the traditional faith. Then God literally stopped him in his tracks.

There are some people who are so intent on what they are doing that the only way to get their attention is by direct confrontation. That is what God had to do with Paul. He had to be turned around and was told to start all over again to go from fighting against Christians to fighting for them. He had to die to self in order to be raised to a new life in Christ.

There was never a greater spokesman for Christ than Paul. His writings are passionate. In his letter to the Corinthians, we find the greatest essay on love ever written. In his letter to the Romans he speaks of how no persecution or hardship or power of any kind can separate us from the love of God. On the subject of women he appears to be a misogynist in his letter to the Ephesians, but then asserts in his letter to the Galatians that more than being Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female we are all one in Christ. God saw the potential in this brilliant man and turned him from an enemy against him to being a soldier for Christ.

Another figure in whom Jesus saw great potential was the apostle Peter. Though he pledged his loyalty to Jesus and vowed that he would never leave him nor let any harm come to him, in a moment of weakness and out of fear for his own safety, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. He knew that he let Jesus down and was sorry. Jesus not only forgave him but saw beyond his momentary weakness to his potential for being a leader of the church.

Both Peter and Paul, two towering figures of the Christian faith had their weak moments. In spite of their failings and shortcomings, they were willing to die for the sake of Christ. Jesus saw in them the gifts and strengths that were needed for the new Christian community. When you think about it, Jesus forgave all his persecutors: Judas who betrayed him, Pilate who condemned him, the soldiers who reviled him and those who nailed him to the cross. Could any of one of us be so forgiving?

We have to ask ourselves how willing we are to forgive someone who hurt us. Can you forgive someone who hurt you and left emotional scars? Could you still love that person in the way that Christian love demands? Most of us would have to admit that it would difficult if not impossible to forgive and forget. Forgiveness always sounds good until you have to something to forgive. If Jesus could overlook the weaknesses of Peter and Paul, if he could forgive the likes of those who condemned and persecuted him, then it should not be so difficult to forgive those who offend us.

Sixty-six years ago today, American and allied forces launched the invasion of the European continent to defeat the German army on D Day. Two years ago, I stood on the beaches of Normandy where the Allies stormed the heights and I looked down from the bunkers from which the Germans fired on them. It is an impressive sight at the American cemetery to see rows and rows of graves of those young souls who gave their lives in that

massive invasion to liberate Europe to end World War II. I was similarly impressed to see the German cemetery to see where those young misguided soldiers lie buried. Their families grieved their loss as American families grieved their losses. We remember those brave German officers and civilians who sacrificed their lives attempting to put an end to the Nazi regime.

When we find it difficult if not impossible to forgive and forget some things, it helps to remember that God always puts away our sins. God does not keep account of transgressions, be deletes and erases them forever.

While I am aware of my faults and shortcomings, I find that there is no shortage of people who are ready and willing to point them out to me. The best thing I can do is to acknowledge them and work on them. When someone offends me and I don't have the opportunity to confront him or her I write it down. President Harry Truman was famous for writing angry letters to people who bothered him after which he stuffed them in a drawer. I have composed letters like that on my laptop, setting out all the things that bother me. I edit it, polish it off with a flourish, read it over and then delete it. I feel so much better having done it and am glad I never send them! I knew someone who took offense at many people and did mail nasty letters to them resulting in being a bitter and alienated old man with not a single friend left in the world.

God deletes our sins. We have no choice but to delete those offenses against us. There is no recovering them once we delete them from our memory. When that hard drive in our head retains nagging offenses, we have to work at trashing them into oblivion. We are better off because we free ourselves from what weighs us down emotionally and spiritually. The abundant love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness in the life and person of Christ Jesus are our example.