

***God Has Forgiven You... It's Time To Forgive Yourself!***  
A Communion Meditation by the Rev. John P. Dick

Do you ever have a hard time letting yourself off the hook? Do you think you are ever harder on yourself than others might tend to be? Or are you ever tougher on yourself than God might be? These are tough questions... tough because they probably hit home for a lot of us.

Take a minute to look back in time. Are there any experiences you remember that you have tended to hold on to which bring back some uncomfortable feelings?

Since this is Superbowl Sunday, let me share an example drawn from the world of football. Noble Doss dropped the ball. One ball. One pass. One mistake. In 1941 he let one fall. And it's haunted him ever since. 'I cost us a national championship,' he says.

The University of Texas football team was ranked No. 1 in the nation. Hoping for an undefeated season and a berth in the Rose Bowl, they played conference rival Baylor University. With a 7-0 lead in the third quarter, the Longhorn quarterback launched a deep pass to a wide-open Doss.

'The only thing I had between me and the goal,' he recalls, 'was 20 yards of grass.'

The throw was on target. Longhorn fans rose to their feet. The sure-handed Doss spotted the ball and reached out, but it slipped through. Baylor rallied and tied the score with seconds to play. Texas lost their top ranking and, consequently, their chance at the Rose Bowl.

'I think about that play every day,' Doss admits.

Not that he lacks other memories. Happily married for more than six decades. A father. Grandfather. He served in the navy during World War II. He appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine with his Texas teammates. He intercepted 17 passes during his collegiate career, a university record. He won two NFL titles with the Philadelphia Eagles. The Texas High School Football Hall of Fame and the Longhorn Hall of Honor include his name.

Most fans remember the plays Doss made and the passes he caught. Doss remembers the one he missed. Once, upon meeting a new Longhorn head coach, Doss told him about the bobbled ball. It had been 50 years since the game, but he wept as he spoke." (Ken Rodriguez, "History Keeps Digging Its Horns Into Texas Receiver," *San Antonio Express-News*, Oct. 26, 2001)

There are those defining moments for all of us, aren't there? Most of the time, by the grace of God they are positive. But there are also those disappointing experiences that sometimes hang on – in the case of Noble Doss – for what seems like forever.

Now I don't know this for sure, but I have a hunch this great athlete has carried his pain through the years because of his overwhelming sense of having disappointed a wide range of people... his teammates and coaches, his classmates, the Texas nation... His heartache isn't born out of the dropped ball. That's just the symbol of his pain. It's born out of the sense of hurt for which he felt responsible.

Do you have any of those places in your life that you find it hard to shed... places where you find it difficult to forgive yourself? Now this illustration is timely because of the day. But in the big picture it is so minor. A game lost... an opportunity punted away. It's small potatoes compared to the things so many folks carry around for which they find it difficult to forgive themselves... marital misconduct, broken homes, cheating in the workplace... things we regret and for which we feel shame that haunt us because of our inability to forgive ourselves. And more often than not we can't help but wonder... *Will God forgive me?*

You see, that's the logical question we all come to at some point. If I can't forgive myself, how can I expect God to forgive me? I'm not worthy. Of course, the good news is God does forgive us because in God's eyes we are worthy! If this table before us means anything, it means we are loved, valued and forgiven. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have an open door to a clean slate and an invitation to move on.

Consider this wonderful story from Matthew's 9<sup>th</sup> chapter which illustrates this point. **“And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’ Then some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming.’ But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, *Your sins are forgiven*, or to say, *Stand up and walk?* But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he then said to the paralytic – *Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.* And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.”** (Matthew 9:2-8)

It's interesting to note that this is the same story told in Mark and in Luke. And in these other versions, we see this paralyzed soul has four friends who will stop at nothing to bring him into the presence of Jesus. Remember? They cut the hole in the roof of the house where Jesus was addressing the masses and lowered him into this holy presence.

I chuckle at the way Max Lucado described this moment. “Risky strategy.” He said. “Most homeowners don't like to have their roofs disassembled. Most paraplegics aren't fond of a one-way bungee drop through a ceiling cavity. And most teachers don't appreciate a spectacle in the midst of their lesson.” (Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers. Volume 25, No. 2. Sept.-Oct., 2009, pg. 34) But Jesus is always the exception, isn't he. We don't know about the homeowner or the paralytic. But we do know about our Savior.

When this young man materializes before him, Jesus says: *Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.* I don't know about you, but I would have been focused upon the guys physical

limitations. I'd have been feeling sorry for the inevitable stress this disability would have brought to his social well being. I'd have been wondering about his emotional stability and how he was feeling about himself. But Jesus cut through all that and went right to the heart of the matter.

What was he thinking? He was thinking about our deepest problem... sin. And if this young man could understand that at the deepest place in his life he was being healed, then his body's limitations would be less of a liability, his emotional stability would have been enhanced, and his... well, you see the point. Before Jesus healed this young man's body – which you will note in the story he did – he cleansed and strengthened his soul.

My friends, God is ready and prepared to do whatever is necessary to forgive us for whatever it is that's holding us down. As Isaiah said so clearly, **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.”** (Isaiah 53:6) But the good news which trumps this prophetic word says with even more passion: *Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.*

When you come right down to it, it's very simple. We know those places in our lives where we're hurting and where we're feeling guilty. All we have to do is confess our need to be forgiven *and* accept God's grace. Then it's over. We are forgiven... our brokenness is forgotten... and we are freed forever. It's a new day. For when Jesus sets you free, you are free indeed.

So, with all of this being said allow me to end with an experience from the life of Booker T. Washington. In Calvin Miller's book, *Into the Depths of God*, he speaks of Booker's mother and the day she offered new hope.

Every morning in Booker's young life, he, along with all the plantation slaves, was awakened by the crow of a rooster. Long before day-break the unwelcome noise would fill the sod shanties, reminding Washington and his fellow workers to crawl out of bed and leave for the cotton fields. The rooster's crow came to symbolize their dictated life of long days and backbreaking labor.

But then came the Emancipation Proclamation. Abraham Lincoln pronounced freedom for slaves. The first morning afterward, young Booker was awakened by the rooster again. Only this time his mother was chasing it around the barnyard with an ax. The Washington family fried and ate their alarm clock for lunch. Their first act of freedom was to silence the reminder of slavery.

Calvin Miller then asks the question: “Any roosters stealing your sleep? You might need to sharpen the blade. The great news of the gospel is, yes, His grace is real, and so is our freedom.” (Calvin Miller. *Into the Depths of God: Where Eyes See the Invisible, Ears Hear the Inaudible, and Minds Conceive the Inconceivable*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2000, pg. 135)

Dear friends... Is something holding you down? Are you having a hard time letting yourself off the hook? *God has forgiven you.* Don't ever doubt that for a moment. Maybe it's time to forgive yourself! May this table be the place where you discover your freedom!

Amen and AMEN!