

Thought from the Pastor

It's February 13. It's nasty outside. Freezing rain. Wet, soaking wet. Cold. So cold your fingers freeze in your gloves. It's also my birth month. Born in the edge of winter. Mom told me when I was born, there were 3 footlong icicles hanging from the barn's eaves. My grandfather died 2 months early in the dead of winter. I do not remember the season I penned this poem. I've never named it.

Winter's deadness looms, hiding the approaching seasons.
Snow, freezing rains, chilling winds. December, January, February.
March's blistering wind announcing its coming.
Nurturing the countryside for the approaching seasons
April's downpours soaking fertile soils
Spring is coming, Life beginning anew
Tender buddings pushing upward from darkness to light
Valleys, slopes, mountaintop parading blossoming pastels
Hope trudging toward summer.
Winter's bitter chilling landscape lingering.

Pauses, stops, starts, what prevents new beginnings? I often wondered the reason I indented this poem the way I did? A pause, a stop. I wondered the significant of that? I ponder the words chosen, the way the seasons are described and images used within them. I feel the tension of moving forward and yet something is holding me back. What is it? Perhaps the title of this poem should be "The Shadow of Unforgiveness."

Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother. Peter thought maybe seven times might be a fair limit. But Jesus said "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22.)

We are tempted to keep counting all the wrongs, hurts, and pains inflicted upon us daily, but the path into and from the wilderness toward resurrection goes through forgiveness.

The Christian walk of forgiveness toward those who have hurt or reject us helps us let go, start a new beginning, and reach the Gospel heights of bearing the fruits of the Spirit. Forgiveness is a daily walk and practice.

To inspire to forgive others and ourselves might seem unattainable. But the duty to relentlessly offer forgiveness falls to us — forgiveness day and night because of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross.

It's a tall order, this business of forgiveness—not just because of our weakness but because of our culture. Ours is a culture of revenge and retaliation. The image I

recall of forgiveness is a few years ago when the Amish community displayed amazing forgiveness when a gunman opened fire in a children's classroom. They offered forgiveness. Forgiveness is the path: Interpersonal forgiveness, communal forgiveness, even global forgiveness.

Pause for a moment. Name anyone who churns up a dark cloud in your mental sky. We might need to forgive them, our parents and siblings, our relatives and neighbors, our classmates and teachers, our politicians and leaders, our presidents and generals, and perhaps ourselves. If you find that difficult to do, then winter's bitter chill still lingers in our soul.

Forgiving ourselves lies within the purview of forgiveness. It is our calling that we should forgive ourselves for all the ways we have hurt ourselves, not accepted ourselves, not loved ourselves as God loves us. Mercy toward ourselves unleashes mercy toward others. Forgiveness is a whole new way of life.

Lenten walk is a good time to ponder forgiveness and pray for those who have hurt us. Prayer is a practice that should be the norm. Forgiveness is a practice that should be the norm for us. Only then can we hope to achieve something of the lavish Gospel message — the capacity to forgive even those who kill our loved ones. Rather than keeping count, Lent is a good time to ponder his words of forgiveness, and practice the gift of prayer. Let's pray and make Jesus' thrilling saga of forgiveness our own daily walk.