

RELATIONSHIP [Repent and Forgive]

~ A winter's day, in a deep and dark December.

I am alone. Gazing from my window, to the streets below, ... on a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.....
I am a Rock. I am an Island.

I've build walls,a fortress deep and mighty.....that none may penetrate. I have no need of friendship.....friendship causes pain.

And, the lyrics of Simon and Garfunkel's song about defiance arising from hurt and disappointment, continues on.....

Isolation, withdrawing or revenge are visceral reactions to hurt and disappointment. So, there must be a tremendous amount of hurt, emotional pain and fear in our culture.....because independence / self sufficiency and conquest sure are highly valued and sought after.

Our society seems to admire a "self made man or woman".
We revere those who claim to pull themselves up by their own boot straps.

For the most part, it is the "law of the jungle" out there.
The first to the scene / the strongest / the richest... get the prize, the glory, the wealth and the honours.
And, the rest..... cast their hopes on the lottery and sing sad songs.

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The Messianic prophecy, from our Isaiah text, stands in stark contrast to the greed and power hierarchy that crushes and destroys everyone. Yes, everyone.

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With symbolic and poetic images, an existence of harmony and peace is presented.

The Messiah will be divinely equipped and empowered to work for such a relationship. He will be the relationship. He will live and proclaim God's justice in the pursuit of such wholeness and peace.

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Even so, the images for harmony are startling:  
a wolf living with a lamb?  
a goat at ease with a leopard?  
a cow and bear grazing together, while their young intermingle?  
Plus, a young child will safely be with them, including near a poisonous snake? A child / the future will be safe / at peace.

And,.....there is ONLY one way this can happen.  
The participants must change.  
The predators will have to change.

The strong, the powerful and the lethal will have to change.

**They** will no longer devour the weak. They will learn to eat plants, and will not harass, threaten, bully or intimate the less powerful.

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To be sure, this imagery is not about the animals mentioned.

This is symbolic, meant to be a strong condemnation about the law of the jungle....which permeates capitalism / our culture.

This picture reveals humanity living in harmony and peace.

And, it shows that some parties involved will need to change more than others. Granted, the weak / the prey... will need to learn to trust, and that is a huge change, too.

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Nevertheless, we are not there yet. We are far from reaching that blissful place of harmony.

The reality is that relationships are Not always balanced, and people make mistakes, and there are hurt feelings..... and brokenness.

And, when that happens, it feels like an assault, and so the primal instinct is to withdraw / to refuse to be hurt again, to Not trust -- to be independent so as to never be hurt again ....or to assault the cause of pain.

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There was a man named Fred.

Fred was picked on at work. He was belittled by his boss, and others took advantage of his weaknesses, too.

So, he decided that he would leave society. He would become an island, and live solely on his own. He was tired of being burned, let down and hurt.

Independent living required many changes, such as growing his own food and so forth.

He planted lots of things, including raspberries, lettuce and potatoes.

When harvest came, he was greatly disappointed that something had got to his lettuce first. There were big holes eaten in the leaves.

That was Not fair. It felt like an assault.

Then, the potatoes had a blight, and during the winter, mice had devoured many of them.

So, he vowed to never grow lettuce and potatoes again, and he got some cats, too.

The next Spring, he was excited to pick the raspberries. He loved those sweet berries.

Yet, as he picked them, the thorns torn at his arms and hands.

This caused pain. He was hurt, so he tore out all the raspberry plants.

He also noticed that his cats were killing birds, and he enjoyed seeing the birds around.

So, he got some dogs to chase away the cats, and they did.

But, the dogs became hungry. Some ran off, and the rest circled his house like polar bears, waiting for him to come out.

Poor old Fred. He was an island for sure, a dessert island, barricaded and starving to death in his own little house, all alone.

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Silly story?

Yet, where does the desire for independence take us?

What do we do when we get hurt / when we are betrayed?

What happens when berries have thorns, or after an assault?

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Some lash back, and become wolves and lions.

Some people retreat into victim mode to be sheep and cows.

And, where does that leave the children?

Where does that leave the future?

And, where does that leave us?

The world is full of broken relationships.

There is too much pain, and too little trust.

And, there is too much aggression, abuse and violence.

Where do the children play?

Where is there safety and harmony?

Where is the peace?

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Out from the wilderness, into realm of broken and dysfunctional relationships, John the Baptist came forward preaching Repentance.

John was known as the Baptizer because he used water baptism as a symbol / a sign of repentance, but it was ONLY for those who repented!!

John invited all to repent, and anyone, Jew or Gentile--everyone would be baptized once they repented.

~Harmony of relationships does NOT exclude. Wholeness invites all to join in. Wholeness is inclusive to all.

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However, the religious leaders came to be baptized, and John was extremely rude to them. He confronted them as one would a rabid wolf.

They wanted to take a shortcut, and skip the repenting part.

It doesn't work that way. Relationships are Not easy.

Relationships are Not easy.

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We need to understand what Repentance is all about.
The Greek word means to turn or to change.
Repentance is not simply saying "I'm sorry" or asking for forgiveness.

Repentance is changing. It is becoming what needs to happen before healing can arrive.
It precedes forgiveness.
Repentance, changing to a more healing mode, starts the process of forgiveness.

In addition, repentance / change is something **We must do on our own.**
Once change happens, then others involved can enter into the process.
When our relationship with God is broken, we must repent / change, and THEN... And THEN God jumps into the process.
John emphasized this sequence in the Matthew text.

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Forgiveness is a process. It is the journey to healing and wholeness in / for all relationships. Granting or receiving mercy is not enough.  
Being forgiven is half the journey.

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And No doubt, forgiveness is NOT easy, and it is best down when both parties participate.

[There are books and charts that explain the process. I have such a chart, and I'll gladly make a copy for you, if you're interested.] []

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Having it mapped out is nice; however, it means little if we do NOT fully grasp the implications of living / being in disharmony ... of settling for brokenness. And, living out of balance is much the same way.

For example, a recent study on Why there is so little severe and violent crime in Iceland, revealed the number one reason is near income parity. There are No rich people and there are no poor people in Iceland. They do have upper and lower middle classes.  
Can you imagine if the tension of that division was eliminated?  
Well, it would be like wolves living with sheep--harmony.

Society is a type of relationship. It can be whole or it can be broken, and when there is brokenness, then forgiveness is necessary for healing.

And, we must understand the consequences of NOT forgiving and of living out of balance.

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For centuries, the subject of forgiveness has fascinated and vexed moral men and women. It pits judgment against mercy,.... rage against compassion, instinct against intellect.

So, what's the big deal? The process of forgiveness can be hard.
It seems easier to just carry the grudge / to be angry and Not try to regain trust.

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Simply stated: un-forgiveness is toxic. It's a destructive killer.

Everett Worthington wrote the book the "The Art and Science of Forgiving."

He states, "From a scientific point of view, unforgiveness is a combination of negative emotions: resentment, bitterness, hatred, anger, hostility and fear." He notes, "In the short run, unforgiveness is empowering, but in the long run, unforgiveness will kill you--literally."

His research suggests unforgiving people have higher levels of cortisol, a hormone that is released from the adrenal glands in response to stress. Cortisol will help you with fight or flight, but if retained / if it remains in your system, it will burn you up.

In contrast, Forgivers have lower heart rates and blood pressure, felt calmer and more in control. Forgivers live longer and live a fuller, more satisfying life.

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Amazing! How did God know all about the benefits of forgiving,... way back then, long before modern science?

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Brokenness in one to one relationships,  
Brokenness with the environment,  
Brokenness in a culture, and brokenness with God.....will surely mean our destruction

Maybe that is why we need salvation. ???

Maybe that is why God calls us to repent, to forgive, to find healing... And to not live with the law of the jungle.

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Nelson Mandela got it. He figured it out.
During his 27 years of prison, he discovered that equality couldn't happen without forgiveness.
A nation is a relationship: connections of countless one to one interactions.

Mandela got it, and he is revered and admired for living and trying to teach his country to forgive and to do justice.

World leaders praised Mandel, the last few days. No one criticized him, because it's obvious forgiveness and equality are the right way.

Justice is the better way--the journey to peace.

So then,..... why are not all the leaders doing the same thing?

Why are we as a nation heading in the opposite direction?

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Moreover, why do we as individuals trip over repentance and forgiveness?  
Why do we have such a hard time advocating for justice and peace for everyone?

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Repentance isn't easy,....nor is forgiveness.

Yet, anger, resentment and unforgiveness are killing us.

And, we are destroying, not only ourselves, but each other and the planet,..... and our relationship to God.

We have to change.
Our salvation depends on change and forgiveness.
That path is the only way to healing and wholeness.
We are all in this together,..... and so is God.

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Christmas is about a child.  
It is about God showing us the Messianic future.  
Christmas is a reminder that God hasn't given up on us.  
God is offering us a future / salvation.  
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There is a voice calling in the wilderness,..... and we hear it.
It is calling out from within / from the stillness of our very soul.

On a midnight clear.....we can hear the angels sing: don't be afraid; you can find the child. You can find the child again.

Fix the brokenness.
Do justice and seek forgiveness,..... in other words, discover the baby Jesus.

Wholeness, harmony, peace awaits down the path of repentance and forgiveness.