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Doing right, sometimes gets us in wrong. It is a true saying that you can't please everybody. Mind you some days I just wish I could please somebody! Anybody! Sometimes doing what you ought to do will not be what some other people want you to do. Certainly for Jesus he did what was of God, even when this cut across the expectations and social pressures of his contemporaries. The life of Jesus wasn't about pleasing people but often he challenged those around him. Yet in following the way of Christ, with all its challenges they, and we, are invited to discover the fullness of life.

Over the last couple of weeks we have seen Jesus do really good things. He has healed the sick, he has cast out demons, he has made the unclean clean: all good things, all 'Good News' stories. The last few Sundays have given us a picture of Jesus as powerful in word and deed, one who conquers evil spirits and disease, whose presence evokes wonder and who is acclaimed by crowds.

The undoubted good that Jesus does also makes him enemies: Yes, he has taught, and taught with authority, 'unlike the scribes'; He has made ritually pure the unclean, but commanded the cleansed Leper to show himself at the Temple to the religious leaders who had excluded and stigmatised him; And yes, today he does good, but in the face of the elite and educated who know because their books tell them that no Carpenter from Nazareth can forgive sins, he declares the forgiveness of sins and allows the paralysed man to walk.

The series of healing stories leads into a series of 'controversy stories'. There is a dramatic shift in mood. The enthusiasm for Jesus shown by the ordinary people is countered by opposition from those who see themselves as leaders, - scribes, Pharisees, Herodians and Temple priests – all seek his downfall.

The crux of the controversy is the way Jesus forgives sins.

I do think that this can be a little difficult for modern man and woman. Partly it is because we have got all so blasé about sin and have presumed upon either there being no real need to forgive, or if there is, that forgiveness is something within our grasp, our entitlement.

Sin is not childish pranks, or naughty but nice whims. Sin is a wound which destroys relationships; in particular sin cuts us off from the goodness, truth and beauty of God. Sin is serious. If the holiness of God is all that is glorious and wonderful and delightful, sin is impure and base and hideous. It is the chasm in the human soul which leads to death. Sin is the evil that lies within and which reaches out to hurt. And yes, sin makes us less than we should be, it dehumanises us. Love creates us: sin destroys. That is why the scribes and the Pharisees were so meticulous in doing the detailed right things which the Law prescribed. That is why the Chief priests were so dedicated in the rituals of sacrifice in the Temple. They were seeking to do right and avoid evil. Although one might be

forgiven (pun intended) for thinking they were more about avoiding evil than doing right.

I think that our easy-going attitude to forgiveness is partly an unhealthy complacency but partly also a healthy confidence in the goodness of God. The atheist philosopher Voltaire flippantly responded when taxed about his behaviour: *Dieu me pardonnera: c'est son metier* "God will forgive me, that's what he does". But beyond the flippancy is a truth. It is the nature of God to forgive. This is not a cause for complacency but a reason for thankfulness: it is the metier of God to forgive. But that of course depends upon our openness to be forgiven, our willingness to accept our fault and receive the grace so freely given. Forgiveness is not cheap: our forgiveness resides in the costly sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This is not commonplace, nor dare we be complacent. Our song is indeed love unknown "Love to the loveless shown, That they might lovely be." Christ opened his arms for us on the cross: we must open our hearts to receive what he would give.

Forgiveness of that spiritual terminal disease, which is sin, is beyond man. The fact that Jesus declared 'your sins are forgiven' was shocking. The immediate reaction was not, 'oh that's nice', but this man is talking nonsense, this man is a blasphemer, this man is outrageous. These learned men knew that God alone can forgive sin. But they did not make the connection, that Jesus was the Holy One of God, the one who had the proper Godly authority to forgive sins. They were not able to get beyond the limits they placed on

God and recognise that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. (2 Cor 5:19) In fact the proper reaction to Jesus declaring 'your sins are forgiven' is awesome wonder. In this Gospel passage it is the crowds who get it right. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

Generations of Christian believing have made us expect forgiveness of sins. And that is not a bad instinct. But let us feel how controversial this is. Let us feel the bite of this story. The forgiveness of sins that Jesus brings is outrageous and it is wonderful. There is clear cut choice here: one should either be outraged or you should wonder.

My sisters and brothers, God in Christ loves us so much he will forgive our sins. This is truly controversial. It turns against the prevailing negativity of our times. It unlocks the patterns of destruction and chaos. It contradicts and counter-acts the cynicism and fatalism of our age. This reverses the trend to nothingness and builds us up in the love of God. Controversy is often about a passionate disagreement: all our human conflicts and disagreements are resolved in the passion of the Lord.

Hear with faith the mighty acts of God in Christ. Be astounded and glorify God. The love of God in Christ makes whole and reconciles. Let the love of God into your life. Rejoice in that. Wonder at that, be healed by that promise.