Sermon:   
**If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.** (John 20.23)

**Christ is the means by which our sins are forgiven, & not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone.**(1 Jn 2.2)

There have been various ways of looking at what Jesus achieved through the cross and resurrection:

- victory over evil, victory over death, supreme example of love, eternal life for us, forgiveness of our sin. At diff times we focus on one or another; today I want to focus on forgiveness. TEXTs.

Jesus said three things to disciples according to John 20.19-23: “peace”, “receive Holy Spirit”, and TEXTa. No talk of mission, preaching, victory over anything, even life after death.

Peace was needed to settle them down, Spirit received so they could understand him. Jesus wanted them simply to forgive, and not forgiveness for their own sin, but their ability to forgive others.

It was as if our ability to forgive others was the whole point of Jesus’ cross, resurrection and ministry.

Jesus himself demonstrates this by his refusal to seek revenge or punishment for what others did to him: **Father, forgive them for they know not what they do** (Luke 23.34).

So we see that he only wants us to do what he himself did. Yet so often we struggle.

Think back over your life & recall some event, person, or conversation in which you felt slighted, verbally or physically attacked, rejected, despised. Has it forever damaged your life? Do you continually brood over it? Is the pain still felt within?

It is easy to say that you were very hurt and at times it feels raw, but could this mean you are holding onto the bitterness, bearing the grudge, unwilling to contemplate forgiveness?

We are called by Jesus to forgive; sometimes this has to be in theory, as the other person/people involved may have since died, or moved to who knows where. (Try writing them a letter even if cannot post it…)

Of course, or it could be members of this church or your own family, and thus something you *can* do in practice. It could even be that you need to forgive yourself!

Are you willing to forgive? Really willing? TEXTb. This is what Jesus has helped us to do.

I realise that to achieve reconciliation forgiveness has to be accepted as well as given; however our calling is simply to forgive. With God reconciliation comes as we accept the need to receive his forgiveness.

The latter part of TEXTa does not necessarily mean ‘we have the power to withhold’ but stressing the absolute command to offer forgiveness, when withholding is at great cost to our souls.

So think about where forgiveness needs to be given in your life; however great or trivial, it is our calling, it is why Jesus died on that cross. TEXTb then TEXTa.