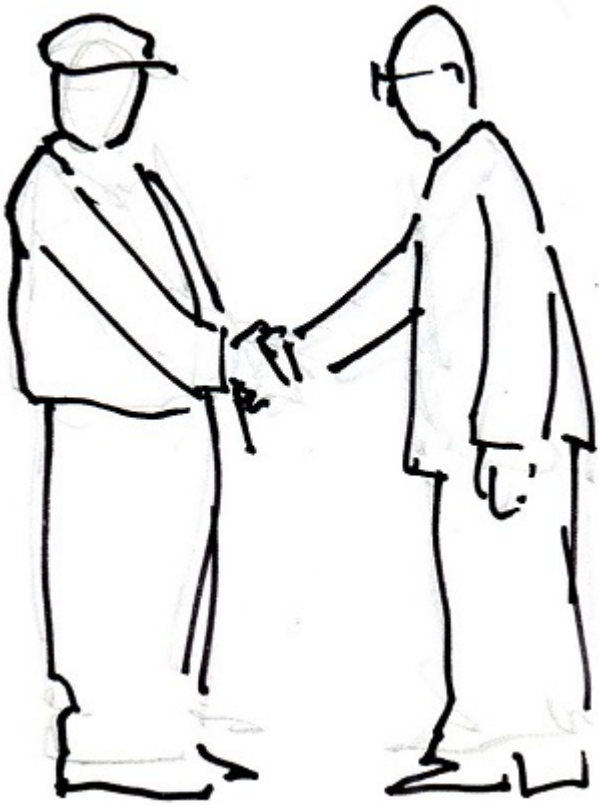
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

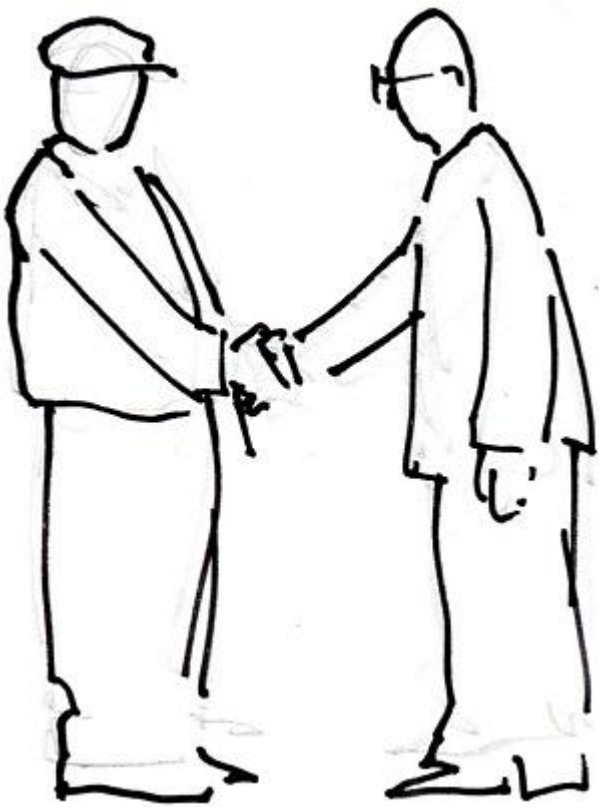
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“Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss” (Psalm 85:12).

2 Cor 3:15—4:1, 3-6; Matt 5:20-26

Jesus challenged the scribes and Pharisees for their external conformity to the law but lack of internal conversion. Their righteous appearance and ritual perfection covered hearts stiff with pride and judgmentalism. They would never kill anyone, but they angrily dismissed people as ignorant fools; they did not commit adultery, but they harbored lust in their hearts.

A high school student in one of my religion classes in Dallas years ago reacted to Jesus’ words about anger and lust with the comment, “Well who doesn’t? We all must be sinners.” Exactly. Jesus was not criticizing the scribes and Pharisees for not being perfect inside and out. He was pushing them for not admitting they needed God’s mercy as much as anyone. For refusing to acknowledge their human weaknesses, they had become hypocrites and ineffective leaders cut off from ordinary experience and the needs of their people.

Pride and self-righteousness lead to an inability to admit our faults or to forgive those of others. This blocks our ability to pray, since love of neighbor is inseparable from love of God. If you have offended someone, go settle with him or her, then

come before God. And settle early before a hurt embeds itself, causing brooding and rationalizing. “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger,” is the advice given to couples. By morning, an unresolved grievance will be twice as hard to fix. Jesus’ parable about going to court perfectly describes the path of unresolved anger. We put ourselves in jail and we will not get out until we have paid the last penny.

We note how early in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus takes up forgiveness. Without it we will never understand mercy, the very essence of God. Unresolved anger paralyzes the exchange of love from God to us and through us to others. The refusal to forgive one person sets the measure for our ability to be forgiven. If we block the flow of love to anyone, we block it to ourselves.

Jesus puts forgiveness at the center of the Our Father. He says we must forgive seventy times seven, perhaps because that is the number of times needed to really offer and receive forgiveness within a single love relationship over a lifetime of trying. It may cost us our pride, but that is small price to pay for untying knots in the lifeline that sustains us in God’s love and the love we need from others to survive in this world.

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