A married couple was going through a rough time. In the process, they both said and did things that hurt one another deeply. With patience and commitment, they worked things out, and began moving forward together. But not completely. One day the wife complained, “Why is it that you keep bringing up my past mistakes? I thought that you had forgiven and forgotten.” “I have forgiven and forgotten,” said the husband, “but I don’t want you to forget that I have forgiven and forgotten.”

When someone hurts us, it’s difficult to forgive and to forget. Jesus is relentless in His insistence that we don’t forgive people once, or seven times, but seventy times seven times. Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father will hand us over to the torturers unless we forgive from our hearts? As strange as it may seem, that violent verse is the key to understanding the parable itself. It’s not telling us what God will do, but in fact what will happen to us if we don’t forgive. If we refuse to forgive, we’ll live in torment, unless we change our minds and hearts. The truth is this: when we’ve been injured deeply, we can never recover until we forgive.

Now we should be clear on what forgiveness is and what it’s not. Forgiveness isn’t pretending that everything is fine. It’s not making an excuse for the person who offended us. It’s not putting ourselves back into the same situation where we can be hurt again. But what forgiveness is, is realizing that we can’t change the past and refusing to let what we can’t change control us. If we refuse to forgive, if we choose to feed our hurt, that hurt can grow and deepen with anger and hatred. That hurt will rule our lives and hold us captive.

Centuries before the birth of Christ, the Greek play, *Medea*was written. In this drama Medea kills her own children to exact revenge on her husband who committed adultery. When her husband asks her, how could she kill her own flesh and blood just to spite him, Medea calmly answers, “Because I hate you more than I love them.” Feeding a hurt creates a monster, a monster that can destroy us. The only way to slay that monster is forgiveness.

On Monday, we remembered the tragedy of 9/11, the heroism of those who tried to save others, and the grief of the families that lost loved ones. Even in the immensity of that tragedy, we’re called to forgive. Forgiveness doesn’t mean that we make excuses for the evil that was done. It doesn’t mean that we relax our vigilance to protect ourselves in the future. We’re called to forgive the terrorists, not because they deserve it, but because we’re on to do it. If we try to build a future based on hatred and revenge, we’ll become what we hate. If we base our relationships to one another on revenge, if we deal with one another based upon ‘an eye for an eye,’ soon the whole world will be blind.

Jesus is warning us about a hard truth. The biggest obstacle to forgiveness is our egos. The devil’s greatest ally is our pride. Feeding a hurt will destroy us. What happens in our life isn’t always fair; it’s not always right. But if we want to be free, if we want to be at peace, if we want to live, we must forgive.