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The journey of forgiveness

Nelson Mandela's journey was indeed a remarkable one; from prisoner to president; from an old-fashioned, rural African, childhood to world statesman; from angry young man committed to the violent overthrow of an oppressive government to man of reconciliation and peace - winner of the Nobel Peace Prize along with his adversary F W de Klerk.

The thing that most impresses me about Nelson Mandela is his remarkable generosity of spirit and willingness to forgive after the hardships he had endured. He was interested in freedom and he recognised that for South Africa there would be no freedom without forgiveness. For without forgiveness the cycle of abuse of one group by another is inevitably repeated as power swings and revenge is taken. A pattern so often repeated in our world.

In fact there is no freedom for any of us without forgiveness. For while we hold on to bitterness and resentment it is actually we who are held captive. Hard as it is, if we want to be free we have to forgive and let go. That doesn't mean forgetting. And it doesn't mean saying that what happened wasn't wrong or doesn't matter. But it does mean choosing to let whoever has hurt us off the hook and deciding that we will not treat them as they deserve.

At the end of the day, we all get things wrong and we all need forgiveness. Perhaps that's why Jesus put that line in his prayer, 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'.