

WHAT COUNTING REMINDED ME ABOUT

My neighbour shared with me during the summer that he was planning to retire come the end of September. Each time I saw him I would ask if he was counting down the days until his retirement. It quickly became evident to me that he preferred to count down based on the number of weeks left as opposed to how many days.

This Monday marked the beginning of his last week of work before retiring. I imagine he has now switched to counting the number of days he still has left. As I have journeyed with my neighbour counting the number of weeks still to go, I have become aware of other measures some people are using to count down to their retirement. A person shared with me at church on Sunday that somebody they know recently commented they have three more construction seasons before they can retire. When I went to the coffee shop on Monday morning the employee getting my large double-double commented how her father has just four more years before he can retire. I would think most people with this many years until retirement would use this measure to count.

Since I turned 60 over the summer, I do find myself joining those who are counting down how long before they can retire. I think it is the pastor in me that uses a slightly different system than the others to count. I have found myself at times counting in terms of the number of sermons I still have to write and preach before I can retire. Another system I have been using is not only counting the number of years I still have left but also the weeks as well. I think these methods of counting I am using have to do with focusing on preparing for a church service every week. In case any if you are wondering, my current count is 4 years and 48 weeks or approximately 250 sermons.

All of this discussion about people retiring reminded me how we all have our own systems or preferences when it comes to counting certain things. I remember as a kid enjoying counting down the number of sleeps left before waking up on Christmas morning to open gifts. On Sunday while I was watching the F1 race on television the commentator shared in kilos how much body weight the racers lose during a race. I prefer to be given that information in pounds so of course I had to do the calculation to convert it. For some reason people who are not Toronto Maple Leaf fans seem to keep counting how long it has been since we have won our last Stanley Cup.

As I was thinking about all of this I was reminded of the time when Peter wanted confirmation from Jesus on the method of counting that should be used when it comes to forgiving people. One day Peter came to Jesus and asked, "**Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?**" The rabbis taught people back then that they should forgive people who offended them only three times. Peter would have known this already, but we see here that he wanted to be more generous when it came to counting how many times he should forgive somebody. Jesus answered with a much higher count, "**No, not seven times, but seventy times seven!**"

Jesus' comments here reveal He does not want us to have a counting system when it comes to forgiving somebody who is truly repentant. I am sure Peter was caught off guard by this number as so might we. Offering forgiveness toward others is one of the hardest things for us to do. Something that may help us not to have a system for counting when it comes to this is to imagine if God had a count number or limit when it comes to our sins. Imagine for a moment what our tally or count would be with respect to the number of times God has forgiven us? When we realize how many times we have been forgiven completely by God, it should produce an attitude and willingness in us to forgive others. Even if we have to forgive somebody seventy times seven plus one, we need to do so because our count with God is much higher.

By the time many read this message my neighbour will be just two days away before retiring. I am pleased for him. Starting next Monday, he can begin counting with the new standard that this is day 1 or week 1 of his retirement. I will still be using my same old standard come Monday that I am 4 years and 47 weeks, or 249 sermons away from joining him.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean