

## **Forgive. Be Forgiven.**

Sunday Pentecost 14, Year A

Genesis 50:15-21; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21 -35

September 13, 2020

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I have a question about St. Matthew, the writer of our Gospel reading. He was a disciple. Before that, he was a tax collector. He was a devout follower of Jesus and, as is obvious, wrote a biography of his Lord. But, do you maybe get the sense that either St. Matthew really loved St. Peter, so he included him so prominently in his Gospel? Or, do you think he had a bone to pick with St. Peter, as it seems Peter is always sticking his foot in his mouth?

It is somewhat fun to imagine the interactions and dynamics between the disciples. Especially, after last week, when they wanted to know which one of them would be the greatest in God's kingdom.

Today, Peter doesn't really stick his foot in his mouth, as much as he just doesn't understand his own forgiveness. Last week Jesus speaks of winning back our brother who has wronged us by going to him, with forgiveness at the ready, seeking his repentance; which is his acknowledgement of his wrong, sorrow for injuring his brother, a desire to make it right, and a return to God in humility.

But, today, Peter has a question, "How many times do I have to do that forgiveness thing with my brother? Like as many as seven times?"

Peter, Peter, Peter.... He just doesn't understand his own forgiveness. Certainly, if someone does me wrong, I will forgive them. It was a mistake. It hurt, but hey, I'm a Christian. They're a Christian. They repented. It is all good.

Fool me once, shame on me. Fool me twice.... (shame one you). See how our world views forgiveness? Wrong me once, that's ok, we can work through it. But, hurt me again and

forgiveness is withdrawn and the relationship is severed. But, guess what... we aren't the world. We are Christians first, citizens of the world second.

So, Peter, is actually trying to be very generous with his forgiveness. Instead of fool me once... Peter is suggesting a whopping seven infractions. He is offering to forgive up to seven times!

So, we laugh at Peter, because he gets it wrong once again and Jesus corrects him, but he is actually being more generous than we usually are, or would even suggest.

So, Jesus takes Peter's generous offer and stretches it even further, taking it beyond the breaking point. "*Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

The Greek here lends itself to be translated as either seventy-seven or seventy times seven. The exact number, however, is not what is important, as you will hopefully see in a bit. But, Jesus intentionally gives a large number, a number that none of us could, or are willing to, go along with. So, we will just go along with our translation which says "seventy-seven times".

But, still, seventy-seven times?!?! Why would I let someone hurt me seventy-seven times? Well, it's because we don't understand our own forgiveness, either.

So, Jesus gives us, and Peter, a story. The story of the unforgiving servant. And, just like forgiving seventy-seven times, it is extreme. Super extreme. Mega extreme. Extremely extreme. But, makes the point spectacularly.

Jesus tells of a king. This king wanted to settle accounts with his servants. So, he brings in one of those servants.

This particular servant comes in and owes him ten thousand talents. When we say "ten thousand" we pretty much already assume it's a lot, because that's a big number. Even ten thousand pennies are a lot of pennies. But, let's translate this ten thousand talents into a modern

number. A talent was a measurement of weight. So, it's worth depended on what was being weighed. If this servant owed ten thousand talents of silver, it would be somewhere around \$161,000,000. Yet, if it was gold... it would be closer to \$12 billion. Either, way, there is no way this servant is going to be able to pay it. And, the king does not offer a payment plan. The amount is due. Today.

Since he couldn't pay, the king ordered that the servant, his family, and all his possessions be sold in order to recover part of the debt.

The servant falls on his knees and begs the king to be patient. The servant promises to repay it. The king does not take him up on the offer. Instead, the king has pity on him and forgives the entire debt.

This servant then goes out, no doubt with great relief. He then sees a fellow servant. Yet, this servant owes him 100 denarii. A denarii is what was payed for a day's work. The servant who had just left the kings presence, goes over to this guy and demands payment. The other servant gives the exact same plea, "*Have patience with me, and I will pay you.*" The first servant does not like that arrangement, so, instead of being like the king and forgiving, he calls for that servant to be put in prison. (Sidenote, how is he going to repay him if is stuck in prison and can't work?)

The king hears of this and calls that unforgiving servant in. The king berates him and then throws him into prison until his debt is paid. (Sidenote, how is he going to repay him if is stuck in prison and can't work?)

My friends, welcome to Christianity. I first want you to notice the generosity of that king. Who would allow someone to rack up that much debt in the first place? Millions and billions of dollars? And, then to forgive it all!?!?

This king is, of course, our God. And, you are that unforgiving servant. And the debt owed is your sin and wickedness. God will call you into His presence to settle your account. Your debt is great. He has been generous with you. He could have recalled the debt much sooner, but He allowed you to keep going, to keep taking advantage of His patience and love. And, take advantage you did. You owe Him a huge debt.

Yet, for the sake of His Son, Jesus, He forgives your entire debt. Forgiven, because Jesus paid for it...with His life. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23). Debt paid. Debt forgiven.

Freed from a prison of eternal hopelessness and despair, prison from which we could never repay our debt, we walk freely out into the world, not with gratefulness in being set free, not in relief that our debt is lifted, but in rage against our own brothers who owe us an extremely smaller debt. Instead of forgiving, we withhold forgiveness.

Remember, we should always approach our brothers and sisters with forgiveness at the ready. It should be a treasure that we are ready and willing to give at every moment. Just as God continues to give it to us. We seek His forgiveness with a voracious greed. We covet it very much. Why? Because, of our own sin-selfishness. We want ourselves to be okay. But, we could care less about those around us. *“You wicked servant!”* You don’t understand your own forgiveness.

My friends, forgiveness is a mark of Christ’s Church. It is the one gift that God has given to us to distribute. If we cannot forgive our own Christian brother, then what example are we giving to the world?

Lift one another up. Support one another. Grieve with one another. Rejoice with one another. Rebuke one another. Forgive one another. This is life together. This is what it means to understand your own forgiveness.

Understanding your own forgiveness means that you owe a great debt to God. He does not have to forgive you. He owes you nothing. You owe Him everything. You *“justly deserve [His] present and eternal punishment.”*

Understanding your own forgiveness means that when He forgives you, you are forgiven. The debt is removed. *“As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins...”*

Understanding your own forgiveness means that you take that forgiveness granted to you and you give it to others in need of it. *“Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name.”*

Understanding your own forgiveness means that God will *“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*

Understanding your own forgiveness means that God has no limit on how much He has, does, or will forgive you. If you need it, it’s yours. *“Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins.”*

Understanding your own forgiveness means that we should remember all of these things when we confront a brother who has wronged us. Our goal is not revenge, pain, or heartache, but to regain that brother, to see him repent, and to give to him that gift of forgiveness that was granted to us.

Forgive. Be forgiven. Forgive. Be forgiven. Forgive. Be forgiven. Forgive.

I hope, I think, Peter may have finally begun to understand his own forgiveness. I hope, that you, too, have once again begun to understand your own forgiveness, too.

*Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Amen.*