



St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Matthew 18:21-35

Theme: About Forgiveness.

The holy ground upon which we stand in the Church... **the** holy ground on which we walk with the Lord is that ground of hallowed forgiveness. **Jesus wants all** who follow Him to stand on such soil. **Soil converted from** the cursed earth that cries out for vengeance. **Soil converted to** the Rock upon which His Church is built... **that** soil where all should stand... **from** the infants, littlest of those who believe in Him... **to** the oldest...**to** those who sin in vile ways...**to** those who seek to live humble and pious lives. **All Christians are** to stand on the soil of forgiveness, no matter what our station in life.

Jesus proclaimed His promise that He would shed His Gracious Presence among those who stand on such holy ground... **He** promised where two or three are gathered together in His Name, **there** He is in the midst of them ... **just** as we are gathered together here, in His Name. **He has promised** to be with us.

So let's talk about forgiveness. **We all have** people in our lives who vex us. **Those who seem** to go out of their way to irritate and anger us. **There is the obstinate** guy who always is doing the same irritating thing... **the** young member of the congregation who always acts the same impulsive way which gets him into trouble...**maybe** it's the Christian woman in that pew over there who speaks the same gossipy words.

Then there are those who intentionally hurt us. **The one member** of your family, perhaps, that knows how to push your buttons and does so with regularity...**and** then comes and asks you to forgive them...**only** to turn around and take a shot at you one more time. **What are we** to do with someone like that? **How are we** suppose to forgive someone like that?

We don't really know what thoughts were going through Peter's head on the day when the events of the Gospel Reading for today took place. **But we do** know the question he asked the Lord...**and** we know the answer Peter received. **Please listen to** the first part of Matthew 18:21-35 now and later during the rest of the sermon for today...it's about forgiveness.

"**Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." It's fairly easy** to see where Peter is coming from...**he's saying "Look Jesus, I** am a patient guy and, as your follower, I would be expected to be patient with the transgressions of my brother who sins against me. **I suppose my** patience would last up to seven times. **Is that what** You had in mind, Lord?" **You really don't** expect anymore than that, do you Lord?"

The text. "Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Listen to what Jesus said. "Seventy times seven?"

Jesus is not setting a finite number of 490 as the limit to our forgiveness. **He is saying** that there should be **no limit at all** to our ability **and our willingness** to forgive. **Our reaction is...That's impossible. My patience would** not bear it; my merciful heart could not give it; my pardon would have been withdrawn long before

someone sinned against me some 490 times! **But Jesus said** it... **and** He knows that Peter wondered about His answer... **and** He knows that you wonder about it as well. **Listen as Jesus** speaks to Peter and to you.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt."

That seems pretty clear. A king comes to a debtor to settle accounts. The debtor owes him an absolute fortune (a talent is a weight measurement for un-coined money. A silver talent was worth about \$1500 and a gold talent was worth about \$24,000, so depending on the precious metal involved, we are talking about a sum of between \$150,000 to several million dollars...a huge sum) and this servant is very much unable to pay it. **Under the law**, the master declares the debtor bankrupt and orders him to be sold along with his family and possessions as satisfaction. **So, the servant pleads** with the king to have mercy and to be patient, and, that the servant will make the entire payment. **The master knows** that servant will never, ever be able to pay back the huge fortune of ten thousand talents that he owes. **So, moved with** compassion for this man who pleads for him to have mercy and to be patient, the king suddenly frees the debtor and cancels out everything that the man owed!

Imagine, it would be like owing a billion dollars plus interest that accumulates by compounding daily. **You know you** can't ever pay it, but you still promise and you still try. **Suddenly, you are** released from paying back even a penny of it. **What a burden** lifted from your shoulders. **Now you have** a future free of bondage and burden. **What freedom. You could go** out and be about the activities of your day knowing that your debt had been canceled. **What would you do? Jesus continued with** His parable ... **"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii (about \$20.00) and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all." And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him."**

This also appears quite clear. **That one who** had such a great debt canceled found a man who owed him some three month's worth of wages about \$20.00 in that day **The recently** freed man now throttled his debtor and demanded to be paid in full. **His fellow servant** was not able to do this... **and begged** him... **pleading for** mercy and patience... **and promising** to pay everything owed. **The first man** was neither willing to wait nor of a particular persuasion to cancel the small debt. **So, he had** his fellow servant cast into prison. **This despite the fact that his huge debt was just forgiven!**

The master heard about this and confronted the first man, railing against him. **He had canceled** the fortune that this man owed and this man did not have the care or compassion to do the very same thing to his fellow servant who owed him a small sum. **As a result**, the king delivered the ungrateful man to the torturers.

My friends, this is not a Jesus-story about the collection of money owed or the tearing up of financial promissory notes. **This is about** sins against God and the forgiveness that He has given... **and** it's about what God expects others to hear of from you. **Jesus is the** King and we are the servants in His debt. **He frees us** from our huge debt and we are to do likewise to those who sin against us. **Jesus concludes by** saying... **"and the**

master was angry and delivered the servant over to be tortured.... So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

But right here, is where so many people and preachers go wrong. **They think that** we are dealing primarily with an "offering of forgiveness" problem... **when** the real problem is one of the **"receiving of forgiveness."** **Too many think** that Jesus has just given us a little pep talk in order that we might be **more merciful** to others... **more patient** with others... **and offering more** personal forgiveness to others. **The basic problem** of the debtor who owed so much was not one of offering of forgiveness. **Rather, he never** did understand the first part... **he never understood the receiving** of the gracious gift....**A free gift.**

If this parable from Jesus simply means that I am supposed to try to be more forgiving than what I was... **I am still not understanding the forgiveness God has given to me. I might be able... by personal** perseverance and struggle to forgive my brother some 70 times... **or maybe... if I really push it and really milk my personal** piety to the max... **maybe I** could forgive my brother 80 times. **But even doing** that, I am still not perfect! **And what's worse**, the debt I owe is now compounded and I am in a mire! **So I try again... trying** to forgive from **my heart and soul. And as I** do this, things continue to get worse because of that garbage dump, called my heart... **and in the meanwhile** the debt continues to compound. **Oh wretched man that I am, Who will deliver me? If we depend** on our own merits and goodness to forgive, we are doomed because we do not understand what we have been given.

"But, thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus." Let's get this receiving of forgiveness straight... **and once that is done... the offering** of forgiveness will immediately follow. **The mercy that** God in Christ had... **and still** has for you... **when He** passed over your sins and laid them on His Son... **this is the same mercy that He had and still has**, for that brother of yours who continually sins against you. **The patience that** the Lord had and still has... **for you** when He endured the tortures of the cross... **for you...this is the same patience that Jesus had... and still** has, for the brother who has hurt you with his sin against you. **You see, that** person who vexes you, the one who constantly irritates you, the one who hurts you again and again....**Jesus died for him too!**

The forgiveness that the Incarnate Son of God earned for you by His suffering and death... **and guaranteed in His Easter Resurrection, is the same** forgiveness earned for the sins of your brother. **Your brother's pardon is the same as your pardon. Understand this**, for it is vital. **Your forgiveness** comes through Christ. **Any forgiveness you** offer to those who sin against you, comes from Christ! **It is not yours, but His, because you are His! All of it comes from Christ. Not from me, or you, or anyone else. Jesus Christ!**

Who are you...and who is that pastor of yours, that we somehow could summon from our hearts forgiveness of a single sin? **The only basis** for your being able to forgive another is the Word of the Lord concerning your forgiveness. **You don't say, "Because I am a good woman, a patient person, a merciful guy, I announce my forgiveness to you." NO! Rather, you say, "In the Name of Jesus, I forgive you." As a member of the priesthood of all believers this is part of the Good News that you are called to share with others, especially those who sin against you.**

This really is nothing new. **You have been** aware of this for as long as we have been privileged to be in the presence of the Lord and follow the liturgy of His Church. **Perhaps for as many Sundays as seventy times seven, you have hear these Gospel words announced by your pastor. "Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."**

Those are powerful words. **They offer all** that we have in Christ Jesus... namely full forgiveness of all our sins. **We are saved**, restored, made new again...**all** because of the forgiveness Christ won for us. **Without Christ, we** have nothing to offer anyone. **Christ gives us** all. **His forgiveness is** your forgiveness. **Relish this**, live in this...**share** this for it is your greatest gift and possession! In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.... Amen!

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