

Thoughts On Forgiveness

Parables of Jesus: Part 3 “Thoughts On Forgiveness”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 5, 2021

15th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Matthew 18:21-35

Reflection: Psalm 51

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:1-17 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 51 and we hear of seeking God’s forgiveness. That the Lord will wipe away wrongs and let us be clean. That God restores the joy of his people. That when we seek to be redeemed, God is there for us. Does seeking forgiveness from God lift your broken

spirit? Do you find solace in the love that God has for you? Do you extend the faithfulness that God shows you in forgiveness by forgiving others? How can we share in the hope of Christ's redeeming grace?

Prayer: O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to be a forgiving people so that others may know your loving grace. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus' name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 18 verses 21 through 35.

Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?" Jesus said, "Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. Because the servant didn't have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, 'Please, be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.' The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan. "When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, 'Pay me back what you owe me.' "Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt. "When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. His master called the first servant and said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. Shouldn't you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt. "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart." (Matthew 18:21-35 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today's parable teaches us something about how to forgive. And before the parable, we get a bit of conversation. Jesus has been talking with the disciples and they've been discussing different things and Peter comes up with a question. "How many times should I forgive someone that sins against me?" Now, Peter could have just left it at that. But knowing that he has to forgive at least some, he decides to insert a number. Peter picks seven times, which is rather generous on Peter's part. Often the standard was three, that three times was

enough. And this is somewhat based on the prophet Amos, with the phrasing that on the fourth instance God turns away. Some rabbis took that to mean forgive up to three times and then the fourth is the line of no return. So, Peter decides to pick seven. Seven is the number of perfection, seven days in the week, seven days of creation. "Should I forgive seven times as many as seven time?" If everyone else is thinking three times, Peter saying seven is being awfully generous. But Jesus has something different in mind. The answer that Christ gives is not just seven times, but as many as seventy-seven times. This can also be read as seven times 70 times. Now one thing we have to take into account is that this is not saying you need to get a ledger and start making tally marks, and once you reach seventy-seven it's time to stop. With a number like that, it's really saying to go beyond keeping track. Go beyond numbering how many times you've forgiven, and simply forgive. And that's big. And it's big because forgiveness is hard. It's easy to slide from being forgiving to wanting revenge. But here we have Jesus saying you forgive because that's all you can do. It's all you should do.

So, Jesus tells a parable about the Kingdom. And in this parable, we have a king who is looking to settle accounts with his servants. The servant that comes first owes a lot. So much that it's hard to explain how much. Today's translation uses 10,000 bags of gold. Others refer to this as 10,000 talents. Now, if we work this out, just so that you have an idea of how immense a number this is, a talent is about 6,000 denarii. Now remember, last week we talked about giving a denarion for a day's wages. Well, one talent is about 6,000 day's wages. So, we can get a feeling for how big 10,000 talents would be. A talent could also be thought of as a certain measure of gold, so the modern translation of 10,000 bags of gold is fitting. But the image is the same. This servant owes an incredibly massive debt. Of course, the servant didn't have enough to pay it back. So, it's ordered that the servant, all his possessions, his wife, his children, all of it sold so that it can go towards what's owed. But then the servant falls down before the king and begs "be patient and I will pay you back." Of course, we know that's not going to happen. The master, the king, decides to have compassion. He releases him and forgives the massive debt. Now just picture that for a moment. He owes multiple lifetimes worth of debt and it's forgiven. Amazing, right? It's huge.

But our parable doesn't end there. Because there's something more that we need to learn about forgiveness. That same servant goes out and he finds one of his fellow servants. This servant owes him 100 coins, 100 denarion, 100 days wages, and he demands his money. Time to pay up. So, then we get a scene that, Lo and behold, is familiar. The fellow servant falls down before him and begs "be patient and I will pay you back." But this time, there is no forgiveness. He refuses. He has him thrown into prison until he can pay off the debt. Now this doesn't go unnoticed. The other servants see what happens, and they're bothered. So, they go and tell the king, their master. And the king calls the servant back to him. "You appealed to me, and I forgave you. Why couldn't you have mercy the way I had mercy? You had just been forgiven for so much more. Why couldn't you forgive?" Furious, he hands him over to the

guards until the whole debt is paid. And Jesus ends it with this statement: “my heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

This gives us some thoughts on forgiveness. One of those thoughts is that when we see the servant who owes so much to the king beg for more time to make good on his promises, he's forgiven. But he doesn't take it to heart and learn the lesson from that forgiveness. And that was the main takeaway that I had from our reading today. I was first reminded of the way that Christ teaches us to pray. And we say it in different ways. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Forgive us for how we do you wrong, as we forgive those who do wrong to us. But no matter how we put it, the concept remains the same as our parable for today. The forgiveness that we give is the forgiveness we receive. That when we are called to account, part of that's going to be, “and how much were you willing to let go?” Thing is, we are in a position where we know we are forgiven. We aren't waiting to be called to account because we know that Christ died for our sins. Christ died that we could know we are forgiven. That God's love extends to each of us to forgive us. Even if we feel we owe more than a lifetime's worth of debt to God, God forgives. But part of that is that God expects us to forgive. And why shouldn't we? Because the other thing that we know is that if God is forgiving us, God is forgiving others. And if God has forgiven others, who are we to speak against God's forgiveness? Who are we to argue that God is wrong to forgive? Not one time, not three times, not seven times, but forgiveness beyond measure. That if God is willing to forgive so much, shouldn't we be able to forgive the wrongs done to us?

Another thought on forgiveness is that we are called to forgive for forgiveness's sake alone. Yes, we always seek repentance. And we always encourage others to repent. But the thing about forgiveness is that for us, it's a sign of our compassion. It's a sign of our love, of the grace that we receive through Christ. That Christ's grace has been extended to us so we may extend that grace. In the same way that God's generosity extends to us so that we can be generous, God's grace extends to us so that we can forgive. Because there's something to be said for being able to forgive. It lightens our load. It unburdens our hearts when we let go. What good does it do us to hold on to resentment and anger, if all it does is push us farther from Christ? What good is it want to keep track of how we've been wronged, when God just wants us to know that we are forgiven? The master in our parable today forgives an enormous debt, massive in scale, and yet, the servant goes off after a debt that's just a tiny fraction of that. Out of greed. Out of anger. Not taking that compassion and turning it as an inward feeling and saying, “I have been forgiven so I can forgive.” Instead saying “I have been forgiven so now I'm free to go and get what's mine.” Because if we can't forgive others, it's saying that we don't expect God to forgive us. If we can't forgive others, then it means that we condemn ourselves by our own hands, by our own words, by our own actions. We are proclaiming that we don't want to be forgiven because we want to hang on to other people's wrongs and expect our wrongs to be held on to as well. And I've got to tell you, that's not the life I want to live.

So, here's the deal. What does this parable tell me? Jesus, to me, is saying "look, God will forgive you for more than you could ever understand, comprehend, or pay back." And what is asked in return is to let go of those things that are done by others. Because even in the grand scheme of things, there's so little we can do compared to the big picture. That God is willing to forgive us for a lifetime of wrongs and expects us to be able to let go of clinging to the wrongs of others. Is that really so much to ask? We recognize our own forgiveness by forgiving. That we recognize God's love by loving. That we recognize God's grace by extending grace. And then, not only are we showing our own compassion, but as disciples of Christ, we are showing Christ to others. Because then, when we are extending forgiveness, we are not only extending ours but we are extending the forgiveness that God has given us to others and bearing witness to Christ's love to them. And we open the door. And we can say, "I forgive you, just as Christ has forgiven me. And I know that Christ forgives you, too." That anger and resentment and stubbornness may fall from our hands so that, together, we may embrace a life in Christ. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

September 12th – *Try Asking* – Luke 11:1-13

This week, we have a parable all about the importance of asking. In it, we look at having boldness in our prayer and with each other.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Allen Goebel & Family	Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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