

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 17, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 18: 21-25

THEME: FORGIVENESS

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. **23** “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he could pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

In the name of Jesus:

Please pray with me the Lord's Prayer. Have you ever felt a catch in your throat when you are praying the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us? Is our forgiveness from God based on how we forgive, or if we forgive others? If that were the case, none of us could be forgiven, because none of us forgive perfectly! We are not gracious enough, we aren't loving enough, in fact, sometimes in our forgiveness of others, it can be downright difficult, especially when someone has wronged us so grievously, or has hurt us so badly, that we find it difficult if not impossible to forgive.

In our text for today Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive his brother who sins against him. The rabbinic tradition of the day would say that you should forgive a person three times. So Peter probably thought that he was being generous when he suggested that one should forgive someone who has wronged you seven times. But Jesus in His answer to Peter blows that suggestion out of the water. Jesus says that just as our Heavenly Father has forgiven us, we are now called to forgive as God our Father forgives, without limit.

To illustrate this Jesus follows up His answer with a parable. A King wanted to settle accounts with his subjects. One subject came to the king with

a debt of 10,000 talents, a debt he could not repay. To make amends, the king orders the servant to sell himself, his wife, children, and all that he owned in order to repay the debt.

This was too much for the servant, who fell on his knees pleading for mercy. Out of mercy the king forgave the servant and released him of all he owed.

But then the servant went out and instead of doing the same thing to those who owed him money, he seized the debtor by the throat and ordered him to pay up. The debtor pleaded for the same mercy that this servant had received from the king. But nothing doing! So the servant had him thrown into prison until he would repay what he owed.

Others saw what took place and went to tell the king what happened. When he found out, the king summoned him and said, "You wicked son of a gun! I had mercy on you and you should have then had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you! I forgave you because you pleaded for mercy." And with that, the king threw the servant into prison until he repaid all he owed. The moral of the story is this: God the Heavenly Father will do the same to everyone who does not forgive the person who has wronged you from the heart.

God the Father has forgiven you all of your sins, for He sent Jesus into the world to be your Savior. Jesus was born for you, lived, died and rose again for you. You are forgiven because the blood of Jesus cleanses you from all of your sins. Your sins are cast away from the Father's sight as far as the east is from the west. He remembers them no more! You are forgiven! Freely have you received mercy, you are now called to go and share that mercy with others.

But Pastor, it is hard to forgive and forget!. Yes it is. It isn't easy. But God calls you to forgive just as He has forgiven you. The Lord knows that it will be hard to forget the things that have been done wrong to you. But you are still called to forgive one another, even as Jesus has forgiven you.

Forgiveness is hard for us, for one, we are sinners to the core. When wronged we want vengeance. We want payback. We want blood! But Jesus reminds you and I that His blood covers all of our sins. You are forgiven! However, your sinful nature will remind you of the wrongs committed against you. Not only that, but Satan, the great accuser, stands at the door of your heart and whispers into your ears sweet nothings such as: "Are you going to let that person get away with that? Wouldn't revenge be sweet? Give that person what he deserves, because you don't need to be treated like that! If you don't

take matters into your own hands, who will? You need to look out for yourself! No one else will, so go ahead, give that person what you think he deserves. You will feel better in the morning if you do.”

And therein lies the problem, Satan continually lives at the door of our hearts tempting us to do anything but forgive those who have wronged us. Satan will bring up the wrong time and time again, even at a time when we least expect it, all in an effort to throw those sins in our face to goad us into living a life of vengeance instead of living the life of forgiveness that Jesus calls us to live.

So in this constant, daily struggle, Jesus gives us the help we need in these times of need. He reminds you that you are Baptized, a child of the heavenly Father, that you have faith in Jesus and that you have put on Christ in your Baptism, so now you do have the power and ability to forgive, even as Jesus has forgiven you. He speaks His Word of forgiveness today, assuring you that nothing will separate you from His love. And Jesus comes to you giving to you His very Body and Blood in this Sacrament, for the forgiveness of all of your sins, for the strengthening of your faith, empowering and equipping you to forgive others just as Jesus has forgiven you. That is why it is so vital to attend church services weekly, so that you can receive not just the forgiveness

of all of your sins, but also receive the forgiveness to share with others throughout the week.

For a beautiful example of what this type of forgiveness looks like just remember our Old Testament lesson and how Joseph treated his brothers after their father Jacob died. The brothers knew that they had treated Joseph badly, selling him into slavery and faking his death to cover up their sin to Jacob. After Jacob's death, they asked Joseph to forgive them, they fell at his feet and declared: "Behold we are your servants." But Joseph never sought revenge. Instead, he wanted to share his forgiveness with them. He said to them: "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." And so Joseph not only forgave them in that moment, but he continued to be kind and loving to them. What an example of forgiveness! What an example of the love God has for you, for me, and for all!

So when wronged, don't seek revenge. Instead, be like Joseph. Jesus has forgiven you, so that you can now share His forgiveness with others.

To the glory of God and in Jesus name. Amen