

Trinity 22

(November 8, 2009)

Matthew 18: 21-35

“Forgiveness is the Life of the Church”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text is the Gospel lesson, the parable of the unmerciful servant.

Peter comes to Jesus and asks him the important Law question: How often should I forgive my brother, seven times? Jesus reply is that he is to forgive his brother seventy times seven, or in other words, he is to forgive his brother as often as he sins against him. And to demonstrate the how and why of forgiveness, Jesus tells the parable of the unmerciful servant. It is the story of how God forgives our debts and sins, and does not pay us the death that we deserve so much.

You know the story. There was a king who wanted to settle accounts with his subjects. There was one man who owed him 10,000 talents, a fortune. The man could not pay, and so he was going to be sold into slavery, along with his family and everything he had, so that this one man's debts could be paid.

But the servant cried out, **“Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.”** The poor man, faced with a lifetime of slavery and his family ruined, begs and asks the absurd. I will pay you all. As if that were possible. The debt was too high. There was simply no way that the man could pay for it. His life was forfeit. He was a slave, and had nothing to offer, nothing to give to the great king.

In our culture today, there is a sense about money that it isn't real. I can put everything on my Mastercard, and it's almost as if there is nothing owed. It isn't real money; it's just credit card debt. So a person may become five, ten, twenty, even thirty thousand dollars in debt or more, without even realizing that it's happening. Until one day you wake up and your credit is gone, and you have a thousand dollar a month payment just on the interest for your so-called **“fake money.”**

That is how so many operate with money today. But worse still is that is how we all operate when it comes to sin and forgiveness. We really believe that sin just isn't that bad. We all operate under the fantasy that we can really pay the debt for our sins. Our sin, inherited from Adam, is so great that we cannot possibly pay the debt to God. We deserve nothing but hellfire and punishment, because we by nature have abandoned his Word and Law, and have tried to make it on our own. Yet we seek to bargain with God. I'll be wild when I'm young, but I'll be good when I'm older. That will be fine. Children will be children. We all operate as if God uses a scale and as long as my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, well, then I'm okay. The problem is that we don't understand the scale. Like this servant in our text, we don't fully grasp how far in the hole we really are.

Now the king recognized it. He saw that this poor, pathetic servant was so blind and ignorant that he didn't even realize how deeply in trouble he really was. You don't bargain with the king. You beg for mercy. But this king, the good king, showed mercy on the servant even though he didn't have the good sense to beg for it. The king forgave his debt. Wiped it clean. Gone. As if they never existed. The man's life was back, at the word of the king.

This is what Christ our Lord does for you. At his death on the cross, our Lord paid your debt for you. All of the weight and guilt of your sin laid on his shoulders. And all of his righteousness and perfection became yours. So instead of being poor and in debt to the point of ruin, you are rich. Rich with God's mercy and love. There is a mansion in heaven with your name on it, paid for by the good king, Jesus Christ the crucified.

But this is not the end of our parable. This servant, the poor ruined one who is now free, immediately goes out to one of his fellow servants and asks for a hundred denarii. A pittance compared to the great debt that he owed. Virtually pocket change. Yet the mercy of the king had not sunk in. He throws the fellow servant in prison, his family into slavery, and has no mercy at all.

This, my friends in Christ, is what you and I do when we refuse to forgive our neighbor his or her sins. Christ has given you everything. He has paid your debt to the full. Eternity in heaven itself awaits you. And yet, and yet we hold grudges as if Jesus hadn't died on the cross. We virtually keep score cards with our family and friends on how has sinned against me the most. We are quick to judge and harsh in the judging. Like this unmerciful servant in our parable, we long to play the bad-guy, and to show so-called righteous anger over an offense received or a debt owed. *How often have you assumed the worst with your spouse?* The house

isn't clean, the yard isn't done, dinner is bad, the bills aren't paid, or whatever the offense may be. Do you forgive them? Do you show love and compassion, or do you use it as a chance to gain another point in the battle of the sexes?

Or think about your children. **Fathers, do not exasperate your children**, says Saint Paul, **but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.** Are you patient with your children, loving, kind and above all compassionate? Do you gently and patiently teach them God's Word and the Small Catechism? Or are you hard and unbending, unhelpful and short tempered with them? We've all been there. We're the adults, and yet it is so easy and so tempting to take our troubles out on our children.

What Christ invites us to in our text is a different way. Christ first of all wants to teach us that we are all in this together. We are all like this poor servant in our text. We all have huge debts to pay, that we cannot possibly manage on our own. Yet Christ pays the debt in full. Forgiven. Free. The debt is canceled. And because of that great forgiveness which Christ won for you on the cross, you are free to live your life with eternity in mind. You are free to forgive, to be longsuffering, patient and kind above all measure. Christ has done it all for you.

It is true, though. We, like the unmerciful servant, often forget what God gives to us in His Son Jesus Christ. We take the forgiveness of sins for granted. We don't think of ourselves as the chief of sinners, but as the chief of saints. That is why we come to church. We come to church so that God can do His work of Law and Gospel on our hearts. We come to church so that the good king can show mercy once again. Remember Jesus' words, seventy times seven. The king in the parable showed mercy but once. But our heavenly king shows mercy to us every day of our lives.

And the surest testament of his mercy and good will toward you is in the Lord's Supper. It is here, at His Altar, that Christ our Lord, the only truly good king, gives you His mercy and forgiveness week after week. We don't deserve it, but only this rich food of eternal life and melt our hearts and keep us in the true faith all the days of our life.

So come to the Lord's Altar. Forgiveness is the life-blood of the church, and that life-blood flows out to you in the fullest measure at this place. In Jesus' name. Amen.

POSTED BY REV. KEITH GERUE AT 2:07 PM 0 COMMENTS 