

Pentecost 15 9/17/17
Matthew 18:21-35 19A

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY,
FROM THE 18TH CHAPTER OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Today, September 17th, 2017, is my parents' 67th wedding anniversary. That's right, they were married 67 years ago this very day at Zion Lutheran Church, McGregor, North Dakota, by the Rev. Arnold Blom.

I call that to your attention because the focus of our worship this Sunday is FORGIVENESS. Now before I say anything else, I'm not trying to cast stones at my parents – at the Seminary, this is why they teach you never to use your family as sermon illustrations, right -- but forgiveness is very much a part of 67 years of life together.

Whenever I do a wedding, I like to remind the bride and the groom that the person they are marrying is a sinner, and that they, too, are a sinner. What is true of marriage is true of every earthly institution. You are a member of a sports team, and that means your coach is a sinner, your teammates are all sinners, and -- guess what? – you are a sinner. At work, your boss / supervisor is a sinner, all of your co-workers are sinners, and every day you go to work, you go as a sinner.

As sinners, they will sin against you. They will offend you; fall short of your expectations; disappoint and frustrate you; hurt you. And, the question for us is -- What do you do? This Sunday, Jesus teaches us that you forgive them. Maybe the real question us is WHY? Why do you forgive your neighbor who has sinned against you? **YOU FORGIVE THEM BECAUSE GOD HAS FORGIVEN YOU IN CHRIST JESUS, AND YOU ARE CHRIST TO YOUR NEIGHBOR.**

Peter was confused about forgiving his neighbor, and so are you. You, a baptized and confirmed Missouri Synod Lutheran, sitting in the church pew this morning. We do not do very well at forgiving our neighbor. And that's why Jesus speaks the words He does to you this morning.

I. THE DEBT IN THE PARABLE REPRESENTS OUR DEBT OF SIN TO GOD.

“When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents” (v. 24). So, how great is “ten thousand talents”? It's hard to put it into an exact dollar amount, but let's look at it this way: A talent is a unit of weight somewhere between 60 and 80 pounds. 10,000 talents would be between 300 and 400 tons. If we are talking 10,000 talents of silver, we are talking somewhere between \$200 and \$250 million. If we are talking gold, we are talking between \$12 and \$16 billion.

The point is not the exact dollar amount of the debt, so we don't want to get too sidetracked on that, the POINT Jesus is making is that the debt is so great that you cannot even begin to repay it. That is your sin before God. Your sin is a debt that you can never, ever repay no matter how hard you try, or how good your intentions are.

Make no mistake about it, Jesus is pronouncing judgement upon you. Just as the king had every right to sell his debtor, along with his wife and children into slavery, along with all that he had, God in His justice, has every right to send you to the slavery of the eternal punishment of hell for the unbelief of your sin. Just as the debtor in the parable would never be free from slavery, you would never be free from the punishment of hell.

Did you notice what the debtor does when he is brought before the king? He tries to bargain with the king, “Have patience with me, and I will

pay you everything” (v. 26). Even though he cannot even begin to repay his debt, he tries to bargain his way out of it with the king.

Within the context of this parable, you are that debtor! How many times have you tried to bargain with God? How often have you said to God, “I promise! I promise I will never do it again; I promise to do better. I promise not to be so bitter, to be selfish, to complain. I will try really, really hard to be a better person.” With the parable this morning, Jesus is telling you that you are just as foolish as the servant in the parable when you even begin to think you can pay back the debt of sin you owe to God or that you can bargain with God about your sin.

II. What does God do with sin? He forgives it. But, the question I want you to focus on this morning is: Why? Why does God forgive your sin?

To answer that question, we turn to our *Small Catechism*.

Question 181. What moves God to forgive sins? GOD FORGIVES SINS BECAUSE HE IS MERCIFUL AND BECAUSE OF CHRIST’S ATONING SACRIFICE FOR SINNERS (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1986).

In His love for us poor sinners, God sent His Son Jesus to take on human flesh, endure poverty, rejection, and persecution; be arrested and beaten to a bloody pulp; crowned with thorns; and nailed to a cross. He did that for us and for our salvation. He did it because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

Near the end of His time on the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished!” This sentence, “It is finished,” is one word in the original Greek. That one is an interesting word because it was used when a debtor paid his debt. The person who held the debt would write, “It is finished,” on the contract. That meant that the contract had been paid in full. When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He did the impossible. He paid your debt of sin for you.

When He said, “It is finished,” He said your sin debt is paid in full, because as Peter teaches us, “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

III. WHAT DO YOU DO WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR’S SINS AGAINST YOU?

Let me take you back to our Small Catechism again: What moves God to forgive sins? God forgives sins because He is merciful and because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice for sinners. There’s nothing in you that moves God to forgive your sin – it’s all about the heart and mind of God.

So it is with your neighbor who has sinned you, Dear Child of God. It’s nothing about your neighbor -- how sincere their promises are or the depth of their sorrow, or if they are even sorry at all -- its about YOU – for you live and move and have your being in Christ. You are Christ to your neighbor. Baptized and living in Christ, you forgive your neighbor, just as God has forgiven you.

In our Old Testament lesson, we learn from the Christian life and witness of Joseph how to forgive our neighbors who have wronged us. Remember what Joseph’s brothers did to him? He easily could have kept a record of their wrongs and exacted his revenge. But, Joseph forgave his brothers, just as he knew God had forgiven him in Christ. It had nothing to do with his brothers – even whether they were sorry or not – it had everything to do with that fact that Joseph lived in Christ and Christ lived in Joseph.

My Dear Friends in Christ, forgiving your neighbor is life under the cross. In our sinful flesh, it is hard to forgive because our flesh knows only

hate and revenge. But baptized into Christ, our sinful flesh has been put to death. We live in Christ. Remember well those words of Paul: "I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength" (Ph 4:13). Christ strengthens us with His grace through His Word so that we are able to forgive and, so much as in us lies, live at peace with all of our neighbors.