

Pentecost 16 9/17/23
 Matthew 18:21-35 19A

"LORD, HOW OFTEN WILL MY BROTHER SIN AGAINST ME, AND I FORGIVE HIM? AS MANY AS SEVEN TIMES?" JESUS SAID TO HIM, "I DO NOT SAY TO YOU SEVEN TIMES, BUT SEVENTY-SEVEN TIMES."

"Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves."

To which your pastor, in the place of Christ and by His authority, says: "No, you're not sorry enough! Come back when you're really, really sorry!" Or, how about this one: "I'll forgive, but I'll never forget!"

What if God said something like this to you? You would be shocked, outraged, angry! Yet, why should you be shocked? After all, isn't this how you think about your neighbor and the things you say to your neighbor who has sinned against you?

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses how we are to treat our neighbor who has sinned against us. Repentant of their sin, they have been reconciled to God. NOW, WE FORGIVE THEM AS GOD HAS FORGIVEN THEM, "SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN," THAT IS WITHOUT LIMIT.

Jesus tells the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant to answer Peter's question, "*Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him (v. 21)?*" Peter had just heard the words of Jesus, from our Gospel lesson last Sunday, about winning back the sheep who stray in sin. Peter understood the idea was to reconcile the erring Christian to God *{vertical}*. But, Peter did not understand relations between fellow Christians *{horizontal}*. He wanted to place limits on forgiveness, withhold forgiveness from his neighbor, keep a record of his neighbor's wrongs, even though God had

forgiven him.

So, to teach Peter and us, Jesus begins,

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents(vs 23-24)."

The debt of this man to his king was "ten thousand talents." What Jesus means in the parable is that this sum was huge! Despite the pleas of the servant, he could not even begin to pay back a small part of the debt he owed.

I. Like the debt owed in the parable, the debt you owed God was more than you could even begin to pay back. Your debt, in the sense of the parable, is your sin; your breaking of God's law in your thoughts, words, and deeds; what you have done and what you have failed to do.

We don't like to think of sin as being that bad. Its not sin, it's a little white lie. Its just that the devil made you do it. Its just looking out for number one. You can't help it, you were born that way.

The mirror of God's Law shows us the truth. Like Joseph's brothers falling down before him, our guilt reminds us of the debt towards God and our neighbor that we have accumulated.

And, you cannot pay your debt to God. You may think you can. Your sinful flesh will try to convince you that if you have good intentions or do enough good things, you can make up for or erase your sins. But, good works do not atone for sin. You cannot earn forgiveness. The things you do cannot save you.

II. Because you could do nothing to pay the debt of your sin, God took it upon Himself to pay your debt Himself. The debt of your sin cost God His dearest treasure.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, where God instructs Abraham to go and sacrifice his only son Isaac. I always find myself asking: How could a father do such a thing? God was not only teaching Abraham, but He was teaching us how difficult and painful it would be a Father to sacrifice His only son that He loved. Yet, that's what God did for you in His only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

God did supply a lamb for the offering -- God sent His own Jesus to pay the debt of your sin. Peter himself 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 Pe 1:19).*

The cross is God's absolution of all sinful humanity. Your debt of sin is canceled in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Written on that cross, in the blood of God's own Son is: "Paid in Full". Be of good cheer, Dear Child of God, your sins are forgiven.

III. The APPLICATION of this parable for your Christian life is very simple -- forgive your neighbor as God has forgiven you. God forgave you not because you deserved it or earned it, but because God loves you. Baptized and living in Christ, you forgive your neighbor simply because you love them.

You see, in the death of your sin, you cannot love and forgive. Your sinful nature knows only anger, revenge, keeping a record of wrongs. But, in baptism, God makes you new in Christ. Your sinful nature, with all of its selfishness and self-righteousness, has been drowned -- put to death -- in the waters of our baptism. Through that washing of rebirth, you have been raised to a new life in Jesus Christ. Now, living in Christ, you are Christ to your neighbor. You love, as Christ first loved you. You forgive, just as God

has forgiven you in Christ.

Peter got himself into trouble because he wanted to set limits on forgiveness. Peter was willing to forgive his neighbor 7 times, but that was all. In Christ, we set no limits on how many times we forgive our neighbor. God does not keep a record of your sins. God does not sit with a pencil or an iPad and record how many times He has had to forgive you. Living in Christ, you treat others as God has treated you. You forgive, forgive, forgive. You set no limits on how many times you will forgive.

The Bible tells us, *[Love] keeps no record of wrongs (1 Co 13:5, NIV)*. God keeps no record of our wrongs. In Christ, we keep no record of our neighbor's wrongs.

God forgives us of all sins. We forgive all sins against us. In our Old Testament lesson, we learn from the Christian life and witness of Joseph how to forgive our neighbors who have wronged us. Joseph easily could have kept a record of wrongs. It would have been easy for Joseph to exact revenge on his brothers. But, alive in Christ, Joseph treated his brothers as God treated him in Jesus Christ. He forgave them of all the offenses they committed against them.

In our Small Catechism, under the heading of the 5th Petition, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," Dr. Luther teaches us: *Why is forgiveness important for my own life in Christ*. A. My need for God's forgiveness reminds me that I am no better than anyone else. B. God's forgiveness enables me to forgive others, freeing me from anger and resentment toward them (266).

Which brings up the question: How do you know you have forgiven someone? I'm guessing that you have heard someone say something like, "You must forgive and forget". That's a pious sounding statement, but I

don't like it very much. I don't like it because it is really Law, not Gospel.

To forgive does not mean that we will never have memories of the offense again. We may still have memories -- bad, horrible memories -- of the offense against us. The memory may still bother us very much. But, to have memories does not mean we have not forgiven. To "forgive" means that we do not want to stay angry. How do you know if you've forgiven someone? Its very simple. Do you want to stay angry at them?

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 your neighbors.