

St Thomas' of the Air Church
Trinity XXII
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rmcneely+

So likewise will my heavenly Father do also unto you,
If ye from your hearts,
forgive not every one his brother, his trespasses.

Haven't we all encountered people who sin against us
We confront them
They apologize: "I didn't realize".
"It won't happen again."
And then it does, the very next week?
And the process repeats and repeats?

Before long you're sick of it.
Have you wondered if you
are being taken advantage of?
Whether your kindness is wasted on the so and so?

That is exactly where Peter was coming from when he asked Jesus
How many times must I forgive the so and so
Where to I stop?
What is the limit?
Can we put a number on it
How about 7?

An interesting question from the man
Who in a few months
Will denounce Jesus three times
During His trial
How many times did Jesus forgive Peter?
Notice that Peter understands that Christ demands
That we be forgiving people
Peter gets it.

But the weakness of his question is the thought
that there may be limits on Christian forgiveness.

Rather than give Peter a direct answer to the question
Jesus gives him
And He gives us
The parable of the unmerciful servant;
Today's Gospel from St Matthew

I think we all relate to the story
And that is why Jesus gives us a parable instead of an answer
We sympathize with the poor servant
Who owes a small debt
But who is thrown into prison
We cheer when the King hears of it,
And justice is restored

There is an interesting thing about this story and how we react to it

The popular media teaches,
in countless movies and TV productions
that its heroic to exact revenge
But Jesus is saying something quite different:
Leave revenge to God's judgment
He shows us in a graphic way
That God expects unlimited forgiveness from us
Because we have been infinitely forgiven

There are a couple of things we need to know in order to
understand the true power of this parable.
It has probably been a while since any of us
Checked the exchange rate of talents to dollars

But trust me, when the markets closed on Friday
 10,000 talents is a lot of dollars
 so much so that at the salary of a servant in those days
 it would have taken 2000 life times to repay 10,000 talents
 So when the servant says, be patient with me I will repay all
 It's so untrue and impossible as to be laughable.
 When the king forgives the entire debt
 The man's life is literally restored to him
 He regains his freedom
 His wife and children regain their freedom
 Their assets are saved and they will keep all they own
 He asked for patience and a chance to repay
 But what he got instead is infinitely more.

He will live again with all the potential of a new life.

Now keep in mind, parables are about us
 Jesus is reminding us that each of us
 During our lifetimes
 Have committed sins throughout our lives
 Those things we have done, and
 Those things we ought to have done
 I won't speak for you
 But in my case, it is a lot
 Maybe not 10,000 talents worth
 But
 A lot
 A debt to God and to those against whom I have sinned
 that I could never repay in my lifetime.

It is not something we like to think about.

When you ask most people how God might see them

You get:

Oh I've lived a good life

I am kind to animals

I gave some money to KQED once

I have never murdered anyone

I've never done anything much that was wrong

I don't think God would think too badly of me.

But here is Jesus pointing out

that the debt of sin that we build up in our lives

is in the billions, -- zillions.

But then comes this amazing news:

God will forgive the entire thing

If we recognize our sins

If we are sincerely repentant

If we amend our lives

God will forgive it ALL.

Wipe the slate clean

Give us a new start

Give us a new life

So we walk away free

But, the story does not end there.

The forgiven servant runs into a fellow servant who, in turn,

owes him a small and manageable debt.

One that could be repaid in a few months at the prevailing

wage of the day.

He confronts his debtor, demands payment

And this debtor says & does exactly what the forgiven servant did

He falls to the ground

Kneels before him

And says: Have patience with me and I will repay thee all.

Now, this guy is telling the truth,
At least he has the capability of repaying the debt

But the forgiven servant does not recognize his own gesture
Does not hear his own words
Does not forgive

And instead
Took him by the throat, threatening to suffocate him to death
Cast him into prison
where he would remain until the debt was paid

The story takes an unexpected turn:
The forgiven would not forgive.

The forgiven servant employs a double standard.
One for him as he seeks forgiveness
And another for his fellow servants.

Peter must have had the same reaction that we do
Incredulity
How could this man who was just given a new life
Begin that life
Oblivious to the mercy he had just received?
It seems the forgiven servant
never came to grips
with how great his debt was.
Never appreciated how that debt had been amassed
Did not comprehend
that he was responsible for the debt

So we learn the first lesson of Jesus' parable:
When we come to deal with someone who's wronged us
We need to be especially aware
Of our own failings
Or our own infinite need of forgiveness

We need to remind ourselves of the enormous debt
 That we owe God
 And that God has removed from us.

As with most of the parables, this one ends with a dire warning.
 The King admonishes the unforgiving servant
 Orders him bound hand and foot
 And delivered to the tormentors
 Until he can pay all.
 Delivers him to hell
 Where he will spend eternity
 Trying, but failing to repay the debt.
 Just as the unforgiving servant sent his debtor to prison
 Where he could never repay his small debt.

Jesus issues the warning:
 So likewise will my heavenly Father do also unto you
 If ye, from your hearts forgive not
 Every one his brother
 His trespasses.
 Jesus meek and mild?

We cannot take this lightly:
 Our forgiveness is in a sense
 Dependant upon
 Or own willingness to forgive others.

Here is the take away today:
 If we wish to receive grace,
 We must be ready to bestow the same grace.

There are some corollaries:
 1. Don't turn it around;
 Just because we forgive others does not guaranty
 That we are forgiven.

2. We are called to forgive but are not called to be stupid
We are free to protect ourselves
Free to prosecute those guilty of crime
3. Our forgiveness is not intended
To prevent the consequences in this life
Of sin and harm
4. Forgiveness is a quality of heart
and is ultimately the exclusive province of God
at the Day of Judgment
5. We must never judge the soul of another.
6. We are to condemn the sin and love the sinner.

That's the wisdom of the day and the warning. How does it work in our lives?

Many years ago, Father Dillon's son Ross
was riding his bicycle
when he was hit by a speeding car
and nearly killed.

He lived in a quasi-vegetative state for years and now with the pains taking work of his loving parents and medical professionals, has regained consciousness and limited movement.

Can we forgive the driver who nearly took the boy's life?

A molester has ruined the lives of many children. Can we find it in our hearts to forgive?

A driver ran into Kathleen,
as she walked in a crosswalk in broad daylight
the driver ran a red light and was drunk.
Kathleen was a retired major in the nursing corp of the US Army

Can we forgive the driver who had previous convictions of driving under the influence?

An East Oakland gang member
 shoots and kills a baby lying in a stroller
 in order to gain membership in the gang,
 the gang that heralds him a hero.
 Can we forgive him? And them?

A church member says or does something that causes offense.
 You hear “sorry” but it happens again.
 And again “sorry”.
 But the pattern repeats. Can you forgive?

We ourselves are sinners; debtors if you will.
 In this world of sin and ignorance
 we have all been hurt at some time or another.
 And we have ourselves sinned
 and caused harm to others.

We are children of God
 and Jesus has paid for our sins.
 When someone sins against us
 we must forgive him
 from a heart of gratitude
 for the grace to which we ourselves are debtors.

As the Israelites mutinied
 and plotted against him, in the dessert of Sinai
 Moses sought intercession and prayed that God would spare them

As St Stephen, the first deacon, was being stoned to death,
 He prayed that his killers would be forgiven

As Jesus was dying in agony on the cross
 He prayed:
 “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

We must show by our lives that there are no limits to
Forgiveness
In God's kingdom