

The 16th Sunday after Pentecost

“The compassionate heart that forgives repentant sinners without limit!”

(Matthew 18:27)

September 17, 2023

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 16th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 18:27.

“Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.”

So far the text...

Like breathing in and breathing out. There was no hesitation. There was no debate on whether or not the debt owed the master should be forgiven. It was simply wiped off the books. The debtor was set free. No prison time. Wife and children were set free. Moved by compassion, the debt was cancelled completely!

Did the master have the right to settle accounts with those who owed him? Of course! When the debtor could not pay, did he have the right to repo anything of value to try to cut his losses including selling the debtor, his wife, children and anything he had? Yes, of course.

The text doesn't tell us how the large debt was incurred – only that it was now impossible to pay it back and justice had to be served in some way.

Jesus gives an illustration that all people can easily identify with – debt. We're told that build credit, a person must take on debt and then show that one is reliable at paying it back. Everyone has a credit history. A record is kept of how timely payments have been made...how great is the debt to credit ratio...whether credit is maxed out and whether or not payments are being made. Every person is given a score.

But what happens if one loses one's job or there is a major unexpected expense, a hospital bill or the car breaks down or the A/C goes out? Or inflation outpaces one's income? A payment is missed, and the credit score starts going down.

Jesus gives the example of a person in extreme debt who had no ability to repay. And whether or not a person has a good or excellent credit score with one's finances, all people have absolutely poor credit with regards to our spiritual debts.

We are all born bankrupt spiritually with original sin. And there is no possible way that any of us can bring down our debt of sin to God with our own efforts. Our debt is insurmountable. Our sins incalculable. And our Master has every right to call us to settle accounts – it's called judgement day.

And as we see that day approaching, what is left for us poor sinners to do? Plead for mercy! I can't pay my debt. In the story that Jesus tells, a completely unexpected thing happens. The debt is cancelled. The Master has compassion. You are free to go!

What is the spiritual meaning of this story? God is the Master. He has compassion and freely cancels the spiritual debt of our sin. For listen again to our Psalm for today, Psalm 103, that describes our God.

**“The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.”**

What we deserve is not dealt to us. We are not punished according to our iniquities. How? How could this be? God just arbitrarily decides, I'm not going hold our sins against us?

No, our Psalm tells us that God's compassion and mercy moved Him to do something absolutely unexpected.

**“Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases,**

4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,

God redeemed your life from destruction! How? He placed your debt of sin and mine on His own Son, Jesus and Jesus paid it all on the cross with His shed blood.

Psalm 103 says, **“The Lord executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed.”**

The Lord executed righteousness by the offering of His Son on the cross! For who? For all who are oppressed! That means you and me! All people! So when we cry out for mercy for our unpayable debt of sin, the Lord graciously removes our debt from us completely!

“As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.”

“Forgive us our trespasses” we pray in the Lord’s prayer. And our Lord graciously does. Always, without limit! He pronounces you debt free in His absolution. He gives you the very body and blood of Jesus in with and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. He daily washes you of your sins in your baptism. Yes, our Father in heaven, pities us with His love and forgiveness daily without measure! **“O bless the Lord, o my soul and forget not all His benefits!!!”**

But, Peter asks... **““Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”**

Forget not all His benefits to you! **“Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”** Without limit!

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”. Ah, forget not all His benefits to your soul when your brother asks you for pardon. You who have been shown mercy, must show mercy to your brother and not demand from him what has not been demanded from you! For if you think you have the right to withhold forgiveness to the penitent soul, then don’t think that you will find mercy from God for your soul!

So Jesus says in the parallel reading from Luke 17 of today's text:

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

By forgiving your erring brother or sister, you show God's compassion to him or her. For God has given you the privilege and responsibility of forgiving your brother without limit. So we heard last Sunday in the verses immediately before our text.

“whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Like breathing in and breathing out. Your forgiveness must be given freely from your heart so that what you loose on earth is loosed in heaven! And what you loose on earth by your word of forgiveness in Jesus, is separated as far as the east is from the west! Why would you want to limit your forgiveness by limiting it to others?? Never! You have known the compassionate heart of God to now show compassion! So, there is a warning, isn't there? Take heed to yourselves. Jesus concludes our Gospel reading with this warning, **“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

Do what? Be cast into eternal prison for not forgiving your brother from the heart. From the heart. Forgiving but not forgetting is not forgiving from the heart. God remembers our sins no more. So He tells us in Hebrews 8:12

“12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

What a relief to hear this good news! Lawless deeds, debts, trespasses, sins, iniquities, they all mean the same – our breaking of God's laws. Jesus uses the word “debts” in the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and “sins” in Luke 11. The bottom line is that our spiritual credit history is bankrupt. But thanks be to God that in His great compassion, He brought us out of bankruptcy, forgave our sins through Jesus death and resurrection and with great compassion daily and richly gives you this good news – you are debt free in Jesus! And our soul breathes easily! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)