**Forgive From Your Heart**

**Matthew 18:21‑35**

Trinity XXII – 11.13.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Can you hear the conversation on the playground as the teacher stands between two boys. “Now you two forgive one another and shake hands.” “Seriously Mrs. Schmedlap, do I have to? He does this every day! Every day! It’s always the same thing. Do I have to forgive him – AGAIN?”

But to be fair, this is not just a playground thing, is it? While you no longer have the playground teacher standing between the two of you, the same problem exists. How many times have you said or thought something just like that?

Immediately preceding our text, Jesus had just taught about what is to happen when a brother sins. First, show him his sin between just the two of you. If that doesn’t work, you are to take witnesses. Witnesses are not necessarily those who saw what happened, they may be witnesses brought into the conversation who will declare that what was done is truly sin. As such, Scripture may be a primary witness. If they still will not repent, then it is to be told to the church. And if they will not listen to the church, then they are to be excommunicated.

Excommunication, if the necessary step, takes place out of Christian love, it is to lead the sinner to understand that their impenitence has serious, possibly eternal consequences. The ultimate goal of excommunication being their repentance for the forgiveness of sins – and the joyful welcoming of them back into communion fellowship.

This brings us to our text and Peter’s question of Jesus. Some rabbis of that time taught that one only needed to forgive someone for the same sin three time – no more than that. Peter has spent a bit of time with Jesus. He knows that Jesus is a bit more forgiving than the establishment church leadership of the day. But he also knows Jesus’s teaching about sin goes deeper than simple outward actions, declaring that sinfulness also takes place in the heart and mind.

With that, Peter comes to Jesus after Jesus’ teaching about leading sinners to repentance for the forgiveness of sins, wondering how this is supposed to play out in his personal life. You are like Peter, for you also want to know, “Do I really need to forgive THEM? AGAIN???”

You want to know Jesus answer to the question, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Our unwillingness to forgive is entirely reasonable – at least to our minds. Sometimes we are like God, omniscient, knowing all things, “I will forgive them when I know they are sincere and truly repentant, until then, no way.” You are convinced you know their mind and heart!

You have a legitimate complaint – even God would not forgive them for that! “If you only knew what they did to me, then you would understand. There is no way to forgive THAT.”

Sometimes it is our need for divine retribution. “When they’ve suffered like they made me suffer, then I’ll forgive them.”

Peter’s question reflect the conditions we have all – at one time or another – placed on our forgiveness, “I will forgive as long as they do not let it happen again.”

“How often will my brother sin against me and I forgive Him? As many as seven times?” Jesus replies, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” And in proceeding to tell the parable in out text, we realize the answer is not 490 times.

You might think that in regard to forgiveness, there is no law. But that’s not the case. Jesus concludes the parable with some severe Law. “And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

It is truly very simple. If you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven. What is more, there will be eternal consequences if you do not forgive.

This is a serious thing, for Jesus is repeating what He taught after teaching the Lord’s Prayer, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Mt. 6:14-15)

Like I said, very simple. If you cannot forgive, then you will not be forgiven. That is serious Law! It is not suggestion! It is not a request! If you cannot forgive others their trespasses, neither with your heavenly Father forgive yours.

Dearly beloved of God, repent! Repent of your sinful unwillingness to forgive. Know that your sinful unwillingness to forgive is forgiven!

Forgiven your sinfulness – forgive!

Look again at our parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants, one was brought who owed him ten thousand talents. Let me put that in perspective for you – in today’s currency, that is 12.5 trillion dollars. I couldn’t wrap my head around that number, so I did some digging to gain a concrete example. That amount would be enough to build – and maintain at war readiness with full crews for 25 years, 390 aircraft carriers in the US Navy. (figured at $7billion to build one & $1billion a year to maintain for 25 years)

You are probably thinking, who could amass such a huge debt? Exactly the point! And those hearing Jesus’ words understood that point. This servant’s debt was so far beyond… how does one accrue such a debt? It was ludicrous to even beg for mercy. Furthermore, what king could afford to lose such an enormous amount. If this were a national debt, it would terrify a country as to how it ever catch-up. So, which king could ever lose out on collecting that debt?

Out of pity for him… Out of the sheer mercy and grace of his heart, the king forgave the debt!! Did you hear what Christ declares? He forgave the debt! He did not say, “Pay as you are able,” nor “pay when you are able.” He released him and forgave the debt. There is no bartering, only forgiveness. It is forgiven! It is gone! Nothing remains of it!

Dear friends, that is your plight before God! You owe a debt for sin you could never pay! It is so over-whelming, it is beyond each of us! All of your sins – sins against every single one of your neighbors – is a sin against God. Add to that your other sins against God alone – and that is the debt you owe to God.

Pity, flowing from the heart of the King, moves Him to forgive. Out of God’s great mercy you are forgiven. Our King pays the debt we owe for sin, Himself.

Out of the tender mercy of our God – out of His loving heart – your King gives His only begotten Son to pay the debt of sin you owe.

The debt owed for sin is your very life – it should be sacrificed unto death. The debt should be exacted from your flesh by scourge and rod – by the blows of cat-o-nine tails and rod – and then death by crucifixion.

You and I do not pay the debt we owe in such a manner. Instead, the rod and scourge fall upon the King’s own Son. He suffers the humiliation of death by crucifixion. He gives up His lifeblood which purchases our forgiveness that we might live.

This is the mercy of God by which you have forgiveness. This is the merciful heart of God by which the forgiveness for all sinners was obtained. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He paid the debt owed for the sins of all mankind.

God gave His Son into death to pay for the sins of all those who sinned against you. He died to forgive them for their sins against you. Why? Because every sin against you – every sin against me – every sin against every single person – is a sin against God.

When you or I say that we cannot forgive, we are declaring that what Christ has paid in full, is payment we do not accept.

We no longer owe a debt against our heavenly King. How can we declare that the debt He has declared ‘paid in full’ is not paid?

Christ purchase forgiveness for the sinfulness of all mankind. Today especially you and I need to remember that upon the cross, He purchased forgiveness for our sinful unwillingness to forgive. Christ’s forgiveness is the only source for your own forgiveness – just as it is the only source by which I can fogive.

I pray that you understand this. God forgives by grace, and it is that gracious forgiveness which empowers the forgiven sinner to forgive as he or she has been forgiven.

Jesus’ warning at the end of the parable points to the source of your forgiving, the heart. No, not your sinful heart! It is not from that heart that we forgive, but from God’s heart – from forgiveness filling us from the merciful heart of God.

God’s heart is given to us, Christ Jesus is given to us. Your heart is changed! In the forgiveness of sin, you are given Christ – you are given the heart of God.

You stand in the grace of God each, and every day, for you stand in Christ Jesus. You stand in the very forgiveness which comes from God’s grace in the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ not only points to the power for our forgiving hearts – Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross is the grace of God in which you stand. Christ is the new heart you’ve been given.

This forgiveness you possess by God’s grace is even more vast than your sinfulness. It is the only resource by which you can forgive others.

You are given something incredibly practical, something to practice every single day of your lives. As you live in the grace of God’s forgiveness, you forgive! Christ Himself dwells within you, He is your new heart, your forgiven and forgiving heart. Christ Jesus, and His forgiveness is the only thing that can dispel the bitterness which often clings to us – the sinfulness that taints our human hearts. Only God in Christ Jesus restores to us true joy. Christ destroys our bitterness and our unwillingness to forgive.

This power is not yours, but it is given to you in Jesus Christ. It is yours in Him. It is yours in Christ Jesus our Lord, by whose sacrifice God richly and daily forgives all your sins. Bask in His forgiveness – soak in your baptismal grace. In your new heart, a gracious gift of God, forgive, just as God, in Christ Jesus, forgives you. Amen.