

Worship at Home Guide



November 8, 2020

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gathering Question/Gathering Music

Opening Sentences **Matthew 5:3**

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you created the heavens and the earth, and humankind in your image. Teach us to discern your hand in all your works and to serve you with reverence and thanksgiving. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn #444 "Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive"

Forgive our sins as we forgive, you taught us, Lord, to pray,
but you alone can grant us grace to live the words we say.

How can we pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart
that broods on wrongs and will not let old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals the truth we dimly knew;
what trivial debts are owed to us, how great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls and bid resentment cease.
Than by your mercy reconciled, our lives will spread your peace.

Text ©1969, 1983, Rosamond Herklots. Music Public Domain. *Few petitions of the Lord's prayer are as difficult to pray as this one, and we would not dare to pray if we had to depend on ourselves, rather than the example of forgiveness we are given in Jesus Christ.*

Prayer of Confession

Jesus said: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled. Trusting in God's grace, let us offer to God our prayers...

Jesus said: Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

In the name of Jesus the Christ, receive God's mercy as we are forgiven! Amen.

Hymn #749 "Come, Live In The Light!"

Verse 1

Come! Live in the light! Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord! We are called to be light for the kingdom, to live in the freedom of the city of God.

Refrain

We are called to act with justice; we are called to love tenderly
we are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.

Verse 2

Sing! Sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one! God will reign and we'll walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love.

Refrain

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Scripture/Meditation Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Then Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven might be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.

So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'

Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’

And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Questions for Reflection and Discernment

1. What questions do you have for Matthew as the storyteller?
2. What question(s) would you like to ask Jesus about this teaching?
3. What word or phrase catches your eye/ear in this text?
4. What human being has taught you about forgiveness? How did they do so?
5. What do you think Peter is after when he asks Jesus’ his question?
6. What is a large debt you have owed (any kind, not necessarily just monetary) in your lifetime that has been forgiven? What were the circumstances?
7. Have you been in the position of the king in this story who forgave a debt (of any size) and then was disappointed in the actions of the one who had been forgiven?
8. How have you reacted in life when you have forgiven someone and you have felt that they did not act in a grateful or graceful manner in the wake of the forgiveness?

Anthem



Two Coins a Meal Offering

We collect loose change (and dollar bills) on the second Sunday of the month for the Two Coins a Meal offering.

- 50% of your offering will be used to support church partners in the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) establish cereal (grain) banks in rural communities experiencing extreme hunger.
- 25% is designated to the Presbyterian Hunger Program to respond to the crisis of hunger in the United States and around the world.
- 25% stays in Midland and helps relieve local hunger.

This offering will be collected at the 10:30 a.m. drive-in worship service, brought to the church on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9 a.m. and noon, or online with our secure [donation website](#). Please put “Two Coins a Meal” in the notes section.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

O Lord, strengthen our faith. Nourish it with passion and love towards you....

Nourish it with passion and love for our neighbors as we offer prayers for them...

Nourish it with passion and love for our enemies as we offer prayers for them...

Nourish it with passion and love for the world...hear now our prayers for the world...

Nourish it with passion and love for ourselves...hear now our prayers for ourselves...

Almighty God, whose Word we trust, whose Spirit equips us to pray, we continue to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn “God, Be The Love To Search and Keep Me”

God, be the love to search and keep me; God be the prayer to move my voice; God, be the strength to now uphold me: O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.

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Sharing of the Peace: Sharing Jesus’ invitation to his disciples:

Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you!

— Resources from the *Book of Common Worship and Glory to God Hymnal*, PCUSA

Interpretation of Matthew 18

Matthew 18 constitutes the fourth of Matthew’s five great teaching discourses. The question from the disciples out of which the teaching emerges is one about which one of them is the greatest (18:1-5). Although the chapter is a unified whole, for purposes of teaching and preaching it can be divided into three sections: Concern for the Little Ones (18:1-14); Dealing with Destructive Sin (18:15-20); and Unlimited Forgiveness (18:21-35).

With respect to the latter, there is nothing particularly Christian about the practice of forgiveness. Whatever our religion or nonreligion, we must request and grant forgiveness almost every day of our lives. Most of the offenses are trivial and unintentional. Forgiveness becomes problematic only when the trespasses are more serious, when they are intentional, and especially when they are repeated.

Behind Peter’s question, “Lord, how often...?” are two possible concerns, one focusing on the offended party and the other on the offender. Experience suggests that there must be limits to patience with misbehavior. Peter may be asking, “If my fellow Christian insults me repeatedly, must I go on suffering this indignity just because he always says ‘Sorry, old boy!’?” Or he may be proposing, “Is it in the best interests of my brother for me to go on tolerating his behavior when his repentance is superficial and his behavior is unchanging?”

These are legitimate concerns, but Jesus' answer addresses neither of them. Jesus' response transposes the problem from the sphere of ordinary human relationships to another realm. The first part of the response consists of a statement exhorting unlimited forgiveness. It does more than this, however. "Seventy-seven times" is probably an allusion to Genesis 4:24, where Lamech proudly boasts to his wives that he will avenge himself seventy-sevenfold on anyone who dares to attack him. Forgiveness is thus presented as the antonym of revenge. Followers of Jesus must renounce the very human intention of getting even with someone who repeatedly injures them.

In the second part of his response to Peter's question Jesus provides the theological grounding for unlimited forgiveness by means of a parable. It is important to note that this is not simply a "Go and do likewise" parable, like that concerning the Good Samaritan. It is a kingdom parable: "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to...." Peter's question addresses a human problem from a human perspective. The parable grounds forgiveness in the nature of God.

At the level of story the parable tells of an Oriental sultan who conducts an audit of the operations of his ministers of state and provincial governors. It is discovered that one has embezzled an immense amount of tax revenue. Restitution is impossible and yet he is set free. In the second scene the central figure is now not the debtor but a creditor. He refuses to do unto others as has been done unto him. In the third scene, the sultan, having learned of the minister's behavior, decides to punish him.

We must be careful to distinguish between parable and allegory. God is often portrayed as a king but not all the king's behavior can be attributed to God. Although the story focuses on the heartless behavior of the pardoned criminal, the theological center is the astounding magnanimity of the king. So it is with the kingdom of heaven.

—from *Matthew, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching*, Douglas R.A. Hare

Meditation on Matthew 18:21-35

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Blessings in God's name on this 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, or the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time. We are coming to the end of the most extended time in the church year, the time referred to as Ordinary Time, so named not because it is a time of low expectations but because it is a time that does not have a holiday, like Christmas or Easter, or the context of a specifically devoted season, such as Advent or Lent. It is a season of growth and the liturgical color is green. For the remaining Sundays of Ordinary Time before the First Sunday of Advent on November 29th, we will be reading and reflecting on the teaching sections from the Gospel of Matthew.

The fourth teaching section could be entitled "Sayings on Humility and Forgiveness," and is introduced with the disciples questioning Jesus: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" While the answer to us is strange, but not shocking, the answer in the ears of Jesus' disciples would have been both strange and shocking. Jesus is speaking of children in terms of age as well as having a relationship with God that is healthily dependent. Jesus, while speaking of children, is speaking to disciples, to you and to me, but not in a way that suggests that we be childish. "Becoming like children" is to be celebrated as Jesus elevates them not only out of respect, but for appreciation of their capacity for humility—not having pretenses. This is what is to be

embodied and emulated. Jesus suggests how being child-like is a faithful example of relating both to God and to each other.

Matthew shares how Jesus warns against putting stumbling blocks (which is different than the natural course of stumbling) in the road for any “of these little ones” (children as well as believers), for it will be equally understood as opposition to God. Strong statements regarding sin, which causes believers to stumble, and the parable of the lost sheep are included in this collection as well as a biblical model for addressing conflict resolution. In the wake of the latter, we come to this morning’s text.

The teaching in the Jewish tradition was that a person was to be forgiven seven times, thus Peter’s question. Jesus responds that forgiveness is not about counting, it is about generosity and graciousness, as he tells the [Parable of the Talents](#) (Matthew 25:14–30). This is a hyperbolic story, a story that makes use of exaggeration to make a point, given how one talent was more than fifteen years wages for a day laborer. Right away the listener is cued into the magnitude of debt on the part of the slave and forgiveness on the part of the king. Unbelievable, this generosity.

The slave chooses not to act as he had been acted upon, however. When he encounters a fellow slave who owed him 100 denarii (one hundred days wages for a day laborer), he not only insists on immediate repayment, he physically assaults him. When the second slave pleads with him for additional time to settle the debt, the first slave has him placed into debtors prison. When word gets around as to his actions, other slaves go to their lord (king?) sharing the events. The lord summons the slave and hands him over to be tortured until the debt was fully paid, which would be impossible while in prison and being tortured.

Ugh. A parable of the kingdom of heaven, a story about forgiveness, which concludes with a warning of extended punishment. All this using the example of a person from whom much had been forgiven, and who is unwilling to forgive someone who owes him much less.

Peter’s question to Jesus, with Peter serving as a representative of all disciples, focused on how many times he was to forgive a fellow member of the church. The word “church” appears four times in Matthew’s Gospel, with three of those four occasions in Matthew 18. This points to how important this teaching was for the church, for the faith communities, including the one Matthew writes to, who had chosen to follow Jesus. The question is about forgiveness, forgiveness of another member of the faith community, and a faith community that may have experienced the fracture of family of origin relationships. The fractured relationships were highlighted in Matthew 10, the text we read and reflected on a couple of weeks ago, because of that person’s willingness to align themselves with Jesus.

All of which contributes to how important the issue of forgiveness is in terms of the church and relationships within the church, but also with respect to our relationship with God. While not included in this morning’s reading, Matthew’s treatment of the parable we have come to know as “[the lost sheep](#)” (Matthew 18:10-14) is part of the teaching unit, thus leading us into a reflection on the question of who is lost?

According to the parable, who is—or is not—lost in this story, and what does it mean to be counted amongst the lost? Whom would you consider to be amongst the “lost” in this story:
the king who forgave such an exorbitant amount;
the slave who couldn’t forgive a fellow slave after he himself was so generously forgiven;
the king when he chooses to follow through with the punishment of the first slave;
anyone who gets into debt?

Who? The story suggests the one unwilling to forgive.

And what does all this have to do with the kingdom of heaven or God? Is Jesus implying that anyone who cannot forgive is lost? How is such an act possible, especially given the amount (in terms of money/debt) forgiven that is noted in the story? Is there meaning in the emphasis on how much each person begs in order to be forgiven? Is that how God works? What about the strong words of emotion that are used in the telling of this story: pity, pleaded, anger; and the thought that torture is offered as an acceptable punishment? And, to bring the question back to Peter’s original question, “Lord, how many times must I forgive another member of the church when they sin against me?” How often...indeed.

Or are you wondering why this is even important? Do we not already, completely, forgive another/other member/s of our community as often as needed? Or do we find ourselves wondering “Who has to do this anyway, I’ve never been sinned against by a fellow member of the congregation.”

Which would be truer for you? Or is the answer somewhere in the middle? It’s not simply a case of never having to practice forgiveness, nor is it a case of losing count while doing so. Is it the fact that one or more instances continue to have a hold of us, much like the hands of the first slave on the throat of the second slave?

Amen.