

15th Sunday after Pentecost  
September 13th, 2020

““The willingness to forgive” (Matthew 18:27)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Today’s text 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.”**

Here ends our text.

Full pardon. Full forgiveness of debt. Complete freedom and release. This story that Jesus told is so captivating. Utter despair is turned into huge relief and joy.

A servant is called in to settle accounts. It’s an Uh – Oh moment. The amount that the servant owes the master is a huge amount – 10,000 talents. To earn 1 talent would take about 20 years and this servant owes 10,000. Well, that 200,000 years of work – basically billions of dollars in today’s terms. Of course, there is no possibility of paying this amount back. What’s left to do? Sell the servant and his family. How much is a person worth? Well, congressional senators are using the \$1,000,000 figure per person as they make their calculations for how much to demand from China as reparation for each of the Coronavirus deaths.

That still wouldn’t come close to repaying the debt fully to the master if that’s the monetary value used to calculate one’s worth. The servant quickly came to the conclusion that there was nothing he had with which to bargain. And he couldn’t work off his debt. The only option was to beg for mercy.

What are the odds that the master would be willing to give mercy?

In 2014, a woman named Alice Marie Johnson was one of 16,000 people who asked for clemency from President Obama. She was serving a life sentence without parole for her involvement in a cocaine trafficking organization. She had made bad choices that got her into debt and worse ones to get out of debt. Her petition was

denied. In 2016, she wrote an article for CNN asking for forgiveness and a second chance. Again, she was denied.

Then in 2018, President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and Kim Kardashian personally asked the president to show mercy for Alice who had spent the last 21 years in prison for a non-violent crime. This time, she received the news she was waiting to hear – President Trump was willing to commute her sentence and she was released from prison! Then, two weeks ago at the RNC convention, President Trump granted her full pardon – her record was clean! Even more important, Alice who is a Christian, has been fully absolved of all her sins through Jesus!

## I. Our willingness to forgive

That brings us back to the meaning behind the story that Jesus told His disciples. Who does the master in the story represent? Who does the servant represent?

This parable is a continuation of the teaching on forgiveness that we heard in last week's Gospel. Jesus outlined the strategy to win back a Christian who had fallen. What was that strategy again? First step – go, second step – forgive. Go to the erring brother or sister, just you remember, and with God's word, show the seriousness of the sin that was committed and then show the mercy of the Savior Jesus.

God has put into His people's hands the power to forgive sin. What you forgive on earth is forgiven in heaven.

And when the disciples heard this, the wheels began to turn in their minds. How is this actually put into practice? How many times do we go through these steps? How many times do we forgive someone? Seven times is a fairly generous number don't you think? Peter asked.

Does that describe your thinking on forgiveness? Your willingness to show mercy? If we're honest, we have to admit it does. We like to put limits on the amount of mercy we're willing to give. Two or three times is pushing it, but more than seven times? If the person didn't learn his or her lesson by now, then I shouldn't have to keep on forgiving him or her.

Are you willing to apply this same rule to yourself? If you commit the same sin more than 7 times do you want God to treat you the same way and cut you off after 7? Ah, let's give this a little more thought.

To help us out, Jesus gives us the parable of the “Unforgiving Servant”. We see that the servant who had been given a second chance on life didn’t use it very well. He found someone who owed him a 100 denarii, basically 3 months wages. A denarii is a day’s wage. “Have patience with me” was the plea. “I’ll work it off”. But there was no mercy, only jailtime.

What a rapid change of events. But isn’t that the way it works in our lives? How quickly we forget the great mercy that God has shown us in Christ and become unwilling to gain our lost brother with forgiveness. Yes, the Master in the story is God – our compassionate God. And who is the servant who was forgiven a huge debt? You...me. And included in our astronomical debt is our unwillingness to show mercy.

We don’t have to travel far for examples. How merciful are you with the people that you are with daily? If your wife or husband asks forgiveness 30 times in one month, basically once a day, then are you willing to gladly and lovingly forgive what Jesus died to forgive

But, my spouse has a weakness of saying things that hurts me. How can I keep forgiving? Well, if the spouse truly repents, then complete forgiveness is to be given. You have been given the awesome power of restoring your loved one!

Jesus has given the power of the keys to you, His church as we heard in Matthew 16. If you deny your spouse or child or friend forgiveness, you are closing heaven to them...and also to yourself! For Jesus warns us at the end of the parable.

**“So, My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

When a person admits sin and says “I’m sorry”, what happens next is so important. A heart unwilling to forgive will typically say this, “Hmm, well you better not do it again.” A “Hmm” is not forgiveness? Instead of love, this answer gives only law. Oh, how the repentant sinner wants to hear the words, “I forgive you”, but only gets a stern reprimand, “Don’t do it again.” Instead of reconciliation, there is resentment, for there is no willingness to forgive. And the unspoken message is that the offended is more holy than the offender and must forever remember that.

Or how about this for a response? “Thank you”. A person admits sin and asks for forgiveness, but gets the response, “thank you”? Ah, what a sanctimonious answer.

What does the “thank you” mean? It means that offender admits to wrong doing and the offended has been grieved. It means that I was in the right and you were in the wrong. I’m glad that we got that straight. But what hasn’t been straightened out is an actual reconciliation. There is no forgiveness given, only an acknowledgement of sin from one who is holier than thou.

Confession is not just a one-way street to make the offended feel better by hearing another’s remorse. No, it is a two-way street, where the offended person opens the door of one’s heart to show Jesus’ love. The sin is forgiven. We ask God to forgive the unwillingness of our heart to forgive, and make us peacemakers with His Gospel.

## II. The willingness of God to forgive

The only way for an unwilling heart to become willing heart is by God’s grace. When we see the enormity of our huge debt of sin and our inability to pay it off, there is only one thing to do...plea for mercy. And God is willing, always willing to show mercy and compassion.

**“Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; In You I take shelter.” (Psalm 143:8-9)**

Our souls take shelter in God’s clemency through Jesus. God doesn’t say, “I’ll forgive half and you work off the rest”. There is no treasury of the merits of the saints to draw on if we run short of payment.

The point of the parable was that it was impossible for us to pay our debt, but not for God. It was fully paid by the Holy One, Jesus, the Son of God. And because Jesus is true man He could be our substitute and be sold for our sin.

But, because Jesus is also true God, His holy sacrifice did not just pay the sins of one man, but His shed blood forgives the debt of all men. His forgiveness is limitless. This is the treasury of grace which Jesus has established. It does not need any additions. Nor are any of our works pure enough to pay for one sin. But God invites us to His throne of grace for complete mercy.

**“14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do**

**not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)**

Yes, we obtain mercy in our baptism. We are united with Jesus death and resurrection and released from our indebtedness. Our sins are daily washed away as baptized children of God.

In our time of need, we come to His throne of grace at the Lord’s table and are given full forgiveness as we eat and drink the very body and blood of Jesus.

Oh, how the devil doesn’t want people to receive forgiveness of their debts in the Lord’s supper. He has deceived some denominations to turn the Lord’s Supper into a sacrificial act of God’s people to pay for their sins. The devil deceives people to believe that they are offering up the blood of Jesus for their sins and building up the treasury of merits! No! Jesus sacrificed Himself once and for all.

The Lord’s Supper is Jesus means of giving His unlimited forgiveness to repentant sinners. It is His 70 x 7 personal giving of forgiveness to each believing sinner who eats His body and drinks His blood in, with and under the bread and the wine. It is the moment that our debt of sin is cancelled by the King Jesus!

Just this week a new season of American ninja warrior began. Contestants run through an obstacle course requiring much strength, stamina and will power. The final challenge is the climbing of the 18’ warped wall and then the contestant hits the buzzer to complete the course.

Matthew 18, makes American Ninja Warrior look like child’s play. We are daily tempted to walk away from those who trespass against us instead of going to restore a brother. Repent of that moment of unwillingness and remember that each of us lives only by God’s grace. We have been called to show this same compassion to others.

We could never climb the warped wall of our debt of sin. We can only plead for God’s mercy. But Jesus climbed it. “It is finished.” Jesus said before He died. And three days later the earth shook at the victory buzzer of His resurrection. Jesus wants all repentant sinners to know this victory through your simple words, “I forgive you”

We heard in our Old Testament reading that Joseph's brothers needed to be reassured that they were forgiven. They believed that when their father died then Joseph would take out his vengeance upon them. They were so scared that they sent a messenger to Joseph

**“I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.” Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” (Genesis 50:17)**

What was Joseph's reaction? He wept. And then he spoke to them in person. **“Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” (Genesis 50:19-21)**

Yes, we are not in the place of God to judge only what the Master will judge when all accounts are settled. But we are in the place of God, and commanded by God, to offer His unlimited forgiveness to repentant sinners. **“whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18)**

**“Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” (Matthew 18:14)**

Thank you God for Your unwavering willingness to forgive us through Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

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