

Scripture:

Matthew 18:21-35

“Forgiveness.”

Last week we looked at the passage immediately preceding today’s ---- Matthew 18:15-20 ----- and its stress on mercy --- grace --- and Christian love.

Today we continue on looking at grace and mercy and love ---- specifically as embodied in the act of forgiving.

And if you weren’t here last week don’t worry today’s message stands on its own.

Forgiveness.

Today in Matthew’s gospel ----- Peter asks Jesus --- verse 21 --- “Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

And Jesus replies ----- “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy seven times.”

“...not seven times, but seventy seven times.”

To be clear ----- forgiveness cannot be determined by a calculator or any other mathematical means ----- yes Jesus gives a number --- but forgiveness doesn’t ever end once a certain number is reached.

When Jesus says forgive not 7 but seventy seven times --- part of what He means is ----- “How ever many times you thought might be enough when it comes to forgiveness ----- exercise it at least 10 times more than this.”

Forgiveness ---- at least the forgiveness that Jesus speaks of --- is limitless and cannot be quantified.

The language of numbers and figures is inappropriate ---- and far to limiting when it comes to forgiveness --- and the parable that follows this discussion between Peter and Jesus clearly demonstrates this.

All true forgiveness ---- all Christian forgiveness ----- forgiveness without any kind of strings or binding memory or calculations ---- is rooted in divine forgiveness --- divine mercy and grace and saving love --- the saving love of Jesus Christ.

To truly forgive --- and to understand what Christ means by forgiveness ----- - we must first come to appreciate and accept divine forgiveness ----- God forgiving each and everyone of us in Christ.

Now ---- if we look at the first servant in the parable from Matthew's gospel today we soon see that he has no real appreciation or understanding of forgiveness in the first place.

When his debts are forgiven by the king ---- debts which are astronomically huge.

In fact ---- one commentator I consulted remarked that ten thousand talents - --- precisely what the servant was forgiven according to verse 24 ----- ten thousand talents would represent 150,000 years of work for a day labourer at that time.

150,000 years worth of wages --- if that doesn't drive the point home about the sheer power and nature of grace and forgiveness what will.

And yet when this beyond huge ----- this almost inconceivable amount of debt is forgiven ----- the servant doesn't even take the time to thank the King.

The equivalent of billions on billions of dollars has been forgiven ---- and yet there isn't a single sign of gratitude.

And not only this but there isn't any sign of celebration or joy either --- there is no sense of any emotion or excitement ever being expressed at all ---- strange.

Imagine --- those of us who have --- or have ever had a mortgage ----- or large debt of any kind --- student loan --- car payment --- credit card --- overdraft ---- personal debt ---- and so on ----- imagine if it equaled --- say -- ----- 150,000 years of work --- in other words --- a beyond huge and then

some amount ---- imagine if it were all of a sudden forgiven --- wiped away at our pleading ---- just like that ----- in an instant.

I'm pretty sure we would be abundantly grateful and would probably throw some kind of a party --- or host some kind of a celebration --- the likes of which we'd probably never ever done before.

The day would likely be marked in some kind of special way.

And yet we don't hear a peep or any sign of gratitude ---- and there is no kind of celebration or party.

And we don't see these things because the writer forgot to include them --- and we don't see these things --- because Jesus neglected to include them when he told the story.

No.

We don't see any signs of gratitude ---- or joy ---- or celebration --- or elation ----- precisely because the servant doesn't have any understanding or appreciation of true forgiveness.

Forgiveness at its core --- finds its meaning and expression and context and roots ----- in divine forgiveness.

And because the servant has no understanding or appreciation of any kind of divine forgiveness he himself is unable to forgive in turn.

Because he has no real concept or appreciation of forgiveness he isn't able to forgive those who owe him --- to show the very same leniency and pardon that he was shown.

You would think that after having being forgiven so much himself he too would in turn ----- "pay it forward" ----- as we like to say now --- and show forgiveness and mercy and grace to those who owe him.

But he doesn't.

And he doesn't because he cannot see himself in their place --- the place he too once occupied.

Instead he only sees himself in a position of power.

Forgiveness --- as the very last line of the very last verse says ----- comes from the heart.

The very last verse in our gospel reading ---- verse 35 ----- clearly shows us that true forgiveness ---- is a disposition of the heart and not just an act or deed that we complete.

To forgive is to give up on the power game of who is right ---- and who is wrong.

To forgive is to give up on the idea of who is innocent and who is guilty --- who owes --- and who is owed ---- and instead join a community of grace --- -- free of cheques and balances ---- free of a keeping track --- free of record book and ledger kind of thinking.

In truth we are all just debtors living among fellow debtors.

We are all just falling short kind of people who have been forgiven living among fellow people who have also fallen short and been forgiven.

We are all saved by Christ living among others who have also been saved in by Christ by no effort or merit of our own.

And so we need to get over ourselves --- and get out of the way of the gospel ---- and forgive as we have been forgiven.

The first servant didn't get forgiveness ---- he never truly appreciated it or understood it ---- that's why he didn't show gratitude towards the king on being forgiven --- AND ---- that's why he doesn't show gratitude or forgiveness to the one who owes him a short while later.

He simply doesn't appreciate or understand divine forgiveness in the first place.

Forgiveness --- as with mercy --- and love --- and grace ---- isn't something merely conceptual ----- something we grasp intellectually ---- it isn't an

academic accomplishment we can post on a wall like a diploma --- certificate --- or degree.

Forgiveness is demonstrated and understood and accepted ---- only as it is shared and acted out by turning and forgiving others.

When we forgive others part of what we're doing is showing our thanks to God for forgiving us through Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness cannot be kept to oneself --- in its very nature it has to be shared and passed on.

And it's this way by simple virtue of the fact ---- that it is a disposition of the heart and not an accomplishment or exercise.

If we forgive begrudgingly or under some kind of external compulsion --- and not from the heart and core of our being ----- saying or thinking something along the lines of ---- "I'll forgive but I'll never forget" ----- for example ----- we've missed the point --- and there is no true forgiveness there at all.

You either forgive or you don't ----- I know I've used this one before but it's so good at driving the point home that I can't resist using it again ----- you're either pregnant or you're not ----- there is no middle ground.

You either forgive or you don't.

There is no middle ground when it comes to forgiveness.

Yes we may have to work at it ---- but ultimately we either do it or don't --- there is no middle ground on a fundamental level.

If we forgive and also remember --- then we still kind of keep track.

And if we forgive and remember ---- we are still at the centre of the interaction --- and not God and His divine forgiveness and grace and mercy.

Unforgiving people are --- at their core ----- selfish people.

And they're selfish precisely because they are unable to see beyond just them selves.

The first servant in Matthew's gospel today cannot see beyond himself ----- that's precisely why he is unable to forgive those who owe him --- all he sees is himself being owed.

Despite having been exactly where the second servant now is ----- the first forgiven servant can only ever see things from his perspective --- which is ----- "I am owed --- so I need to be paid."

To forgive means to see things from a perspective beyond just oneself.

To forgive means to clear the slate --- to do away with cheques and balances --- who is right who is wrong --- who owes who is owed ---- who is innocent and who is guilty ---- and so on.

To forgive and not forget --- which really isn't even forgiveness in the first place --- is like wiping the slate clean ----- only to re-write what was on the slate somewhere else secretly ----- I'll wipe it clean here ---- but really I'll still keep track over here.

Part of what Jesus means when He says that forgiveness is a disposition of the heart is that it is part of who we are by our very nature ----- and not just some kind of a tool or characteristic that we pull out and exercise when required ---- when we see fit.

"Today I'll be forgiving because it is this person and this situation ----- but as for that person and that situation well --- there I will not exercise forgiveness."

This kind of attitude is misguided and not of Christ.

When Jesus says at the very end of the parable --- in verse 35 ---- "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." ----- He isn't saying God keeps track and only if you forgive --- only if you do certain things will He forgive you.

We don't earn forgiveness --- God doesn't forgive us because we have done or accomplished certain things ---- like forgiven others.

That's not what Jesus means in saying ----- "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." ----- reminds us that forgiveness must come from deep within --- must be on account of the disposition of our heart.

And not something we do begrudgingly ----- or under compulsion when in truth we really don't want to.

Forgiveness --- life in Christ in general ---- is all about disposition of the heart --- a changed attitude.

Forgiveness after all is all about change --- it's about changing the way we see and interact with certain situations and people.

It's doing away with cheques and balances ---- innocent guilty --- right --- and wrong --- owed ---- and owe ----- and instead exercising and living out grace --- mercy --- love ----- Divine ----- God inspired ----- grace --- mercy and love --- in Christ's name.

Christ calls us to change in so many ways.

Change the way we relate with each other --- change what we value --- how we spend our time --- our energy --- and our money --- change the way we think about life and death --- indeed doing away with the concept and the reality of death and ushering in life abundant and life everlasting ----- and at its core ----- and it all starts with forgiveness.

Changing the way we see things --- and not seeing ourselves as the fulcrum around which everything else in life revolves.

To forgive is to change our attitude from worldly ways of seeing --- and resolving ---- and judging ---- and interacting --- and giving them over to God instead.

Getting over ---- and past things --- and turning them over to God to resolve and figure out.

It is not possible to be a Christian and not also be a profound --- out of control ----- “throw caution to the wind” ----- kind of forgiver as well.

To forgive is to move yourself out from the centre of the universe around which everything else revolves.

To forgive is to place God and his saving love ---- mercy and grace --- in the centre and leave things up to him to resolve ----- when ---- where --- and how He sees fit ----- and to never look back.

Now when we stop to think of it ----- much of the time forgiveness can be pretty easy.

Forgive someone for accidentally breaking something of yours --- or forgetting to pay you back in some way --- or thank you ----- and so on.

But sometimes forgiveness can be a whole lot more difficult ----  
 -----infidelity in a marriage --- or committed relationship  
 ----- someone stealing something of great value or at least of great value to you personally  
 ----- someone being careless with your emotions  
 --- being taken for granted or cheated on in a business arrangement --- or any kind of arrangement for that matter  
 ----- and then some of the more grotesque kinds as well ---- rape --- abuse --  
 -- violence  
 ---- and so on ----- forgiveness can sometimes be very difficult and ask whole lot of us.

But anyway you look at it ----- we have been asked to forgive ----- we are sometimes put in situations where we simply have to forgive in order to move on and carry on.

And anyway you look at it forgiveness is at the very heart of our faith.

You simply cannot be a Christian and also be someone who is incapable of forgiving ----- Christ drives this point home in our gospel reading today.

The truth is ----- one of the very best ways we can show those who see little or no value in Christianity today ----- is to forgive.

Is to forgive radically.

Not cheaply without care or concern ----- but radically ----- to be gracious and merciful and loving and to forgive when it costs us something.

It cost the King a whole lot to forgive the servant ----- about 150,000 year's wages ---- and yet he did precisely that --- he forgave.

Forgiveness and Christ likeness are so closely and inseparable linked that we do well to pay attention to this parable --- and we do well to pay attention to how forgiving we actually are.

When asked how many times someone ought to forgive another Jesus basically says ---- over and over and over again ----- ten times plus what you plan on or think is appropriate and right.

When asked how many times to forgive Jesus also says --- “Oh yeah and by the way ----- don't just forgive little stuff over and over and over again --- when you forgive ----- forgive huge stuff as well --- for example in financial terms forgive something like 150,000 years worth of wages too ---- that's real forgiveness.”

Forgive often --- and forgive huge.

When in doubt --- forgive.

If you're not really sure what to do --- forgive.

If the situation is dodgy ---- and difficult to work with ---- forgive.

God did ---- does ---- and always will.

And He expects the same.

I can well imagine Jesus telling this parable to His Disciples and asking ---- who was the most gracious and forgiving one --- the king or the servant.

And the disciples of course answering --- “the King”.

And Jesus saying ---“Right ----- now go and forgive likewise.”

And so it is that we are called ---- by Christ --- to be radically forgiving --- just as we have been radically forgiven.

Amen.