

Scripture:

Psalm 103:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

“Grace, mercy, and forgiveness.”

“Forgive us our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

We say these words every week as a community in our Sunday morning worship as part of the Lord’s Prayer ----- “Forgive us our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

We heard a bit about forgiveness last week from the passage in Matthew’s gospel immediately preceding our passage for today.

Today it’s grace, mercy ---- and forgiveness.

And forgiveness is a biggie when it comes to faith.

You cannot be an authentic Christian without also practicing forgiveness ----
----- radical forgiveness even.

And radical forgiveness ---- is the kind of forgiveness that has nothing to do with people coming before us admitting a fault or shortcoming --- radical forgiveness comes not from a penitent sinner --- but from a gracious forgiver.

Radical forgiveness comes from a gracious forgiver.

As followers of the way of Christ ---- forgiveness cannot simply be something we exercise from time to time or in certain circumstances only --- like only when someone comes confessing or asking for it.

As Christians forgiveness must permeate our whole lives.

Jesus said --- “Forgive us our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

He didn't say --- "Forgive just this many times --- or forgive but only in these instances" ---- it's forgive as we are forgiven ---- over and over and over again and freely.

Our ability to forgive or not cuts to the core of our very being --- it helps define who we are and whose we are.

If we belong to God we forgive.

Jesus --- rarely one to exaggerate --- uses exaggeration today in Matthew's gospel to drive the point home about radical forgiveness.

When Peter asks Jesus --- "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus replies ---- "...not seven but seventy-seven times"

What this means isn't just many --- or many many ---- or many many many more than you thought.

What this seventy-seven times means is that forgiveness is not a commodity to be reconciled with numbers.

What this means is that forgiveness cannot be quantified --- or limited ---- or calculated.

What this means is that the language of numbers is inappropriate when it comes to forgiveness.

The language of numbers is inappropriate when it comes to numbers.

"Should I forgive them once or twice or three times?" --- "If I forgive someone for doing something more than three times doesn't that reflect on me --- doesn't that make me look stupid or gullible or weak?" --- maybe ---- but then again maybe not.

Trusting someone time after time after time --- truly believing in someone time after time after time --- when they fail time and time again can suggest gullibility or foolishness --- but forgiving them never will.

Human forgiveness is rooted in divine forgiveness ----- and there is nothing calculated --- and there is nothing foolish --- and there is nothing weak about divine forgiveness.

Indeed so grand and powerful is divine forgiveness that there is no way to accurately measure or capture it.

77 times --- the times Jesus says to Peter he must forgive doesn't capture it --
---- nor does 10,000 bags of gold.

Again Jesus isn't one prone to exaggerating but here in Matthew 18 He exaggerates saying 10,000 bags of gold worth of forgiveness.

I read in one commentary that 10,000 bags of gold would equal 150,000 years of salary.

150,000 years of salary.

Take your own personal yearly salary ---- or your average yearly salary when you or your spouse was working and times that by 150,000 --- and if your calculator is anything like mine ----- it will read error.

Error as in not calculable in that many figures ---- most calculators only have 8 slots for numbers.

Either way it's a huge number --- annual salary times 150,000 precisely because the number itself doesn't matter.

Forgiveness ----- is not about numbers --- it is about a disposition.

You can never count how many times we are called to forgive because we are always called to forgive.

77 times ----- and 10,000 bags of gold --- 10,000 times however many pieces of gold in each bag doesn't capture it.

Forgiveness is about a transformation of the heart --- and the first servant in the passage today doesn't get this.

He still deals in amounts and cheques and balances ----- numerical accountability.

“Be patient with me.” ----- he begs ----- in verse 26 --- “And I will pay back everything.”

Forgiveness isn't about paying back it is about wiping away and forgetting.

Some people have read this passage to mean that unless we forgive we will not be forgiven.

But that's not what's being said here --- this --- like many passages is not primarily meant to be read literally --- and we know this because Jesus is not saying to Peter that in the event of a 78th transgression it would be O.k. for Peter not to forgive.

God doesn't withhold forgiveness --- it comes freely from Him.

Once we accept it --- we are not only able --- by virtue of first receiving it --- ----- but once we accept it we are also compelled and driven to extend it to others.

True forgiveness is all about a change of heart --- the movement from a hardened heart to a compassionate heart.

Forgiveness is not about doing something with a mind of getting something in return

To be forgiven --- to accept God's forgiveness means to give up power and control.

To be forgiven --- to accept God's forgiveness means to let go of cheques and balances ----- stop keeping track ---- and stop counting.

It means to stop looking back.

It means shrinking your rear view mirror and ensuring it is smaller than your windshield.

If our rear view mirror ---- what we see behind us --- is bigger than our windshield --- what we see ahead of us ----- we are not living as a people of forgiveness.

As Christians we are part of a fellowship of forgiven sinners.

And one of the realities of this fellowship of forgiven sinners is that if you cannot forgive you cannot grow ----- and if you cannot grow you cannot be faithful.

In order to remain faithful we must grow and in order to grow we must forgive.

Forgiveness cuts to the very heart of who we are as Christians.

There is no such thing as a Christian who doesn't know how to forgive.

There certainly is such thing as a Christian who struggles to forgive or a Christian who is working out exactly how to forgive ----- but there is certainly no such thing as a Christian who doesn't care about or exercise forgiveness.

True forgiveness --- can sometimes be extremely difficult.

Saying --- "I forgive you." ---- and not secretly harbouring resentment and anger doesn't cut it.

True forgiveness often takes time and effort.

For God to forgive it cost the cross.

Time ---- effort ---- heart ache --- pain --- suffering --- sacrifice ----- these are the words and the reality of forgiveness.

And of course grace and mercy ----- reconciliation ---- transformation --- and ultimately peace ---- and joy ---- and well being --- are also the reality and the words of forgiveness.

He --- or she --- who is without forgiveness always only ever gets stuck in --
- the pain and suffering part of forgiveness.

Once we actually find the road through ---- then comes the beautiful reality of grace and mercy and reconciliation ---- transformation --- peace and joy and well being.

Forgiveness is all about a change of heart and a change of attitude.

If you've ever met anyone that cannot forgive someone for something --- and of course we've all met someone like this --- we've all likely been this person at certain times on certain issues.

But if you've ever observed the person who cannot forgive you very quickly see that they are stuck and they are trapped.

When we are working our way towards forgiveness --- when we haven't arrived there but are working our way towards it --- we very often feel tight and constricted --- we are never truly free and alive until we forgive.

And of course by forgiving we are not saying it is O.k.

By forgiving we are not saying we'll subject ourselves to similar behaviour once again.

By forgiving what we're saying is ---- "I will not hold you accountable on this one ---- I'll let it go!"

As Christians we are not called to be graves people walk over.

As Christians we are not called to be the world's punching bags.

Sometimes we forgive and then we have to walk away ---- refusing to subject ourselves to abuse and damaging behaviour ----- we're not graves to be walked over or punching bags to be hit over and over and over again ----- - but we are forgivers and there is a huge difference.

Punishment and payback is not ours to dole out --- forgiveness is ---- but that doesn't mean we have to be gluttons for punishment.

Human forgiveness is rooted in divine forgiveness.

Forgiveness means we are able to recognize that we don't ever get what we deserve in life so why would we ever think that we can give others what they deserve in life.

Forgiveness means we are able to recognize that we don't ever get what we deserve in life so why would we ever think that we can give others what they deserve in life.

Forgiveness means letting to go and leaving it in God's hands.

Forgiveness means not assuming or acting like we know what is best in a given situation.

Forgiveness is hard.

Very hard --- counterintuitive even.

Forgiveness isn't fair.

Forgiveness doesn't make sense.

Forgiveness costs --- it can be painful.

Forgiveness can be exhausting at times.

But it is also freeing.

It is grace and mercy personified.

And it's not an option for Christians ----- it's mandatory.

And forgiveness must be free and without strings ---- just as the forgiveness that God extends to us each and every day is free and without strings.

“Forgive us our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.”
----- aren't just a few trite words of good advice --- or little nuggets of wisdom.

They are the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

If we cannot forgive we cannot call ourselves Christians.

Because if we cannot forgive ourselves it means we haven't accepted God's forgiveness.

That's the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today is this simple --- and this powerful --- God forgives each and every one of us here today.

We're off the hook ---- we're in the right ---- all is well.

The way the King forgave the servant the 10,000 bags of gold in Matthew 18 today --- that's how generous and abundant and gracious and merciful God is to us.

10,000 bags of gold --- 150,000 lifetimes of debt ---- wiped away just like that.

Complete and utter --- total forgiveness --- that's what this passage is all about today.

It's not about Kings and servants and what we should do --- it's about God's complete and utter --- total forgiveness --- total acceptance of who we are.

And if you're sitting there today thinking you don't need forgiveness --- here comes the sarcasm ----- congratulations you are the first perfect person in the history of the world ---- well done you --- we're lost and we're fools if we think you don't need forgiveness and forgiving.

But today isn't about foolishness or perfection ----- it's about grace and mercy and love.

It's about majesty --- beauty ---- goodness and truth.

The majesty of God ----- the beauty of God -----the goodness of God ----- and the truth that God forgives us all.

Matthew 18 means --- we are not accountable for every mistake that we make.

Matthew 18 --- we're not expected to be perfect.

Matthew 18 --- we don't get what we deserve.

God doesn't give us what we deserve --- instead He gives us a good and abundant eternal life in Him.

A life of grace and mercy and love and forgiveness instead of a life of pain -
----- and punishment ----- cheques and balances --- and payments and re-
payments.

The first servant in Matthew 18 today is only ever all about repaying the debt back at a later date ---- he doesn't ever truly understand forgiveness --- forgiveness is not about paying back.

It is a matter of the heart --- an inner disposition ---- not just wiping something away and remaining full of resentment ---- or wiping something away and saying I'll call in a favour one day for that.

To be forgiven ----- and to forgive ---- means to join a fellowship of forgiven sinners who have forsaken counting and keeping track of things.

“Forgive us our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.”
--- is real --- very real.

And ----- “Forgive our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.” --- is difficult --- very difficult.

Grace, mercy and above all else forgiveness.

That's the gospel of Matthew 18 --- that's the gospel period.

“How many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?”
---- Peter asks Jesus today ----- “Up to seven times?”

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

And then Jesus says this in the very next verse ----- “...the kingdom of heaven is like this...” ----- and He goes on to tell the story of a King who forgives a debt of 150,000 years worth of wages.

Immeasurable --- incalculable --- beyond numbers and figures ----- beyond measure --- that's God's forgiveness.

Grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

The kingdom of heaven is ----

“Forgive us our trespasses ---- as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Amen.