**9/17/23**

**Forgiveness from the Heart**

**Matthew 18:21-35**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

You know it is pretty cool when I can go back in my sermons and learn something from them. It is even cooler seeing how I have grown and changed over the years. My perspective is much different today following various life experiences and education. In 2017, yes 6 years ago, when I was only preaching a few times a year to give Pastor Leah a chance to live life and go on vacation here there, I preached on this very Gospel Reading we have in front of us today. Now, I am not expecting any one of you to remember my sermon from that day. As I read it over, I admittedly only remembered bits and pieces of it. However, today I took a completely different approach to things. I found several other things that needed to be highlighted. Thank God for all the stories and examples we have at our fingertips. Thank God for technology, and the opportunity to even be able to pull things up off of a thumb drive and re-examine them. We indeed learn from ourselves as much as we learn from others. That is of course if we allow ourselves to. Today we get to learn from Peter and Jesus’ initial interaction, and then we get to learn from a parable that really elaborated on things a bit further.

The greatest mathematician ever is on full display here today! Initially if we look at things from a pure numbers’ perspective Peter seems to ask a pretty normal question to start out our Gospel Reading. He even seems to give a rather reasonable expectation of ourselves, or anyone for that matter. If you really think about it seven times seems to be a rather sufficient number of times that we can manage to forgive someone. I mean it is giving a rather decent size margin for error. It is allowing that person to slip up a few times. I mean we expect people to learn from their mistakes, just like we do ourselves, correct? If they don’t manage to learn then we have the right to protect ourselves over the course of time, don’t we? I mean if they keep sinning against us and keep making the same errors can’t we finally chalk it up after seven and just write them or the issue off and move on? Nope! Not today! Not at all! Not ever! We are called to be way more compassionate and understanding than that! We are continually reminded and informed that we are indeed held to a much higher standard as Christians.

Jesus provides a rather ridiculous answer and expectation of seventy-seven times! That for sure is a big difference from what Peter thought. I mean if we could all just step back and picture the look on Peter’s face when he got this response. I would venture his jaw dropped, his head probably was cocked to the side, his shoulders probably fell, and he probably had the look of bewilderment or confusion in his eyes. Peter, and for that fact you and I, are continually reminded that as Christians we are called to a higher standard because we are indeed following the very example that was put in front of us. Now, we get the advantage of knowing the entire story, while Peter was still indeed living and learning from it. Peter would soon come to learn that the very example and guide that was standing in front of him providing him this teaching and feedback would even go to the cross to ensure our forgiveness was eternal. This would far surpass even the number of seventy-seven that was put in front of Peter, or us for that very fact today. The number of times we continue to mess up and sin is astronomical unfortunately. Thank God that he gave his only begotten son to carry our burdens and sins and errors totally. He gave his very life so that we can continue to try and get things right here on this ball of mud before we make it back to that eternal resting place with Pastor Leah and all those that have gone on before us. We indeed get more than seventy-seven chances! We need to give that to others as well! Yes, no matter how hard or ridiculous that might seem!

We can also take a different approach or response to things here and go sit in the corner and cry about it. We can even act like a child and throw a temper tantrum here too if we really want to. And, if we are going to do that, I am pretty sure we would stomp our feet and it would sound like this… What?!?! Are you kidding me Lord?!?! Ugggghhhhh! That is just simply ridiculous! There is no way that I can do that, let alone even try! I mean I don’t even think I can do that with your help! You must simply be out of your mind! I mean grace and forgiveness aside here Jesus, I am just human after all. Come on!

And there it is! We were fine with our argument and temper tantrum for the most part, until we were given too much slack. We ended up putting our proverbial foot in our mouth yet again, as we always seem to do. Grace and forgiveness are never set aside! Without both of those we would not even be sitting here today. We as humans all too often seem to have to put things up on a chalkboard or on a score card for some reason. That is very typical, but typical is not what Jesus did, or what he calls us to do. Typical is a normal human response without the backing of love, compassion, understanding, faith, grace, and so much more. Score is not something we are called to keep of our fellow man! We are called to erase that chalkboard. We are called to throw away that score card. If Jesus didn’t keep score, then why in the heck are we?!?!

So, if we didn’t seem to understand things in a pure and simple manner in just a few sentences to start out our Gospel Reading today, then we get a parable to help us even gain a little more insight. Through this very parable we come to realize how much more of an amazing responsibility we do indeed have! We get informed that “Forgiveness is as much an attitude as it is an act.” (3) Yes, you heard me correctly. Let me repeat that for a little more emphasis here. “Forgiveness is as much an attitude as it is an act.” (3)

Let us go back to even trying to understand the numbers we were given here in today’s Gospel Reading. Let us put things into a context you and I might be able to understand a little bit better. In that process we really need to translate what that currency was in relation to ours. So, “I did a little math on this. A denarii is a day’s worth of wages for a common laborer. So, the second slave owed the first one 100 days of wages. On the other hand, the first slave owed his master what amounts to nearly 183 million days’ worth of wages, and that’s if you don’t take any days off!” (4) Okay, that makes sense, now it is a little easier to understand now. Well, to be honest here, I am not good with just simply one example. So, why don’t we take a look at things from another lens or perspective. “A talent was a weight measure. It was equivalent to 130 pounds. 130 pounds of silver. Back in 2020, the price of silver was $26.97 per ounce. So, 10,000 talents of silver would have been worth $560,976,000.00. This is an outrageous sum of money. In his story, Jesus has purposely chosen a number so impossibly large, the man could never repay the amount. And nevertheless, the king shows mercy on him. He flat-out forgives the debt! It’s a crazy story! What king would forgive over a half billion dollars of debt? No one, that’s who!” (5) So, this takes us back to the plain and simple fact that “Forgiveness is as much an attitude as it is an act.” (3) The attitude and example were provided to the first slave, but in his follow-up act he was not as gracious, understanding, flexible, or forgiving as that which was imparted on him.

So, if we take this story into our own experiences. If we live out this story in our own lives. If we sit back and look at this parable in a way of further examining it, then we all can probably sit here and shake our heads as well, right? We can see the glaring issues. We can see how forgiveness was not provided from the heart of the first receiver here. Then again, whether we want to admit it or not, we all can probably put ourselves in those very same shoes. At one time or another you or I have probably failed to grasp how to just let things go and move on. Our attitude has stunk! We have forgot to act in the very manner that our Lord and Savior would have done if we were the ones standing in front of him just like the king in our Gospel Reading today.

What we then come to learn is that if we do not act in a manner that represents and respects our Lord and Savior then we are going to be held accountable. We are not off of the proverbial hook. We are going to have to pay those debts in the afterlife in the fiery furnace that is never-ending. “When we refuse to forgive then we begin to allow bitterness to stop us from entering into fellowship with God.” (3) We as humans always seem to need reminded that, “Through the grace of God, we’ve already been forgiven from our own errors and shortcomings. An unforgiving heart produces nothing but pain in either the offended, the offender, or even both. Forgiveness frees us from hatred and restores us to a loving relationship with God as well as our fellow man.” (3) So, we need to extend that in all settings and circumstances. Even if we want to or not, because it is what Jesus would have done, and it is what our Lord and Savior does for each and every one of us each and every day, even multiple times if we really think about it.

So, let us do a system reset here! Let us ensure that we are the example we are called to be. Let us show a little bit of Jesus to those out there that may not even know who he is or what he is all about. “Having received the greatest forgiveness possible from our divine creator, Jesus calls us to reflect the light of that divine mercy into the world. The extravagant, unlimited love and mercy we’ve received can emit from us. It pours forth, and it doesn’t keep score.” (5) Let us indeed go out and be the example and provide the very essence of Forgiveness from the Heart!

Amen.

**References**

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 Preaching

 Year A 2023

 September 17th, 2023

 16th Sunday After Pentecost

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 Contributed by Scott Jensen on Oct 8, 2008

 Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

 Denomination: Lutheran

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 Contributed by Charles Miller on Jan 24, 2005

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 Contributed by Mary Erickson on Sep 14, 2020

 Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 18:21-35**

 When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable

 that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

 21Peter 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?” 22Jesus said

 to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

 23“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who

 wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24When he began the reckoning, one

 who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25and, 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. 26So the slave fell on his knees before

 him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27And out of

 pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28But

 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.’ 29Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience

 with me, and I will pay you.’ 30But he refused; then he went and threw him into

 prison until he would pay the debt. 31When his fellow slaves saw what had

 happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord

 all that had taken place. 32Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You

 wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33Should

 you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ 34And in

 anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

 35So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive

 your brother or sister from your heart.”