

9/13/26
16th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from September 6th – September 12th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 18:15-20) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 18:21-35

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What prompts Peter to ask Jesus, "How often should I forgive?"
2. The first servant owes the king an enormous amount of money. Why do you think Matthew makes the debt so impossibly large?
3. What strikes you about the servant's response after receiving forgiveness?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. When you think about forgiveness, which is harder for you: asking for forgiveness or offering it? Why?
2. When someone hurts you, what is your first instinct: confront them, withdraw, get even, pretend it didn't happen, or something else?
3. Have you ever been surprised by your own ability to forgive someone? What made that possible?

Memorize this verse: Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you? (Matthew 18:33) Share time you experienced mercy.

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 103:8-13. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

Forgiveness is life. Which is why Jesus doesn't just stretch Peter's imagination about forgiveness, but breaks it wide open. "Seven times," Peter asks. "Try seventy seven times", Jesus responds. Jesus is saying, way more than you thought, Peter. Way more than you imagined, way more than seems possible, way more than you can actually count and keep track of. Because to forgive is to live free in the present and hopeful about the future, while to not forgive is to be dragged down and kept captive by the past. Forgiveness is life. Fine. But saying it doesn't make it happen. Which is probably what makes this parable so challenging. It's easy to get stuck on the enormity of the first servant's failure. How can the one forgiven so, so much refuse to forgive another? That's a fair question. Yet each of us has probably also struggled to forgive. Failed to notice where we have been forgiven or blessed or loved beyond what we can imagine deserving. And still not extended the same to another. But even the benevolent king, having just forgiven a debt equivalent to the GDP of a small country, seems unable to forgive the first servant's inability to forgive.

So, is this parable a warning? Forgive or else! Is it a lesson? The first servant is already tortured by the inability to live as a free and forgiven person. Is it encouragement, albeit negatively framed? Don't be like the unforgiving servant who was so preoccupied by the debts of others he missed the remission of debt he experienced. Or is it simply an accurate description of just how hard forgiveness can be? Because it's hard. Hard to let go of grievances which have not simply left their mark on us but have become part of our identity, part of the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. Hard to let go of the habit of keeping track, of counting, of always assessing to make sure we're getting what we think we deserve. So what do we do with a passage like this other than say, "you ought to forgive"? Maybe simply, "You have been forgiven." And it won't hurt to add, "You will be forgiven." All things. The things you've done. The things you've not done. Everything. Always.

Perhaps the only way to address how hard it is to forgive is to remind each other that we have been and will be forgiven. Even this, of course, isn't a guarantee. After all, the first servant has been forgiven much and still fails. And we will, too. But this is a parable, not an analogy. The king isn't God and Jesus isn't promising that God can and will forgive all things. Except our inability to forgive. Parables try to capture in narrative form something of what God is like and something of what God desires. Parables try to grab our attention, surprise us by grace, and jolt us to embrace the life God offers us. So that we might offer the same to others. Parables are also just one part of the story, just one sliver of the larger truth Jesus came to share, and so can't be read in isolation of the rest of the Gospel. The parables in Matthew, as you have probably noticed, often have something of an edge to them. But they are embedded in a larger story. This parable doesn't bear responsibility for telling the whole story of forgiveness. And one other important part of the story comes a bit later, again featuring Peter and the disciples, when Jesus says that the cup he gives, the blood of the covenant he pours out with his life, is for the "forgiveness of sin." And these words are only in Matthew. These words do not appear in Mark's telling of the scene, in Luke's narrative, or in Paul's remembrance. But they are in Matthew, spoken on the evening when his disciples will betray, deny, and abandon him, standing like a promise that even when we fail to live into the grace Jesus offers, even when we fall short of extending to others the forgiveness we have received, yet God is still there, forgiving, loving, beckoning us home. Maybe that's the place we end up with this text. Maybe in hearing once again of God's forgiveness our gaze will be lifted up from the constant keeping of scores to see God's open hand of blessing. No guarantee, of course, but just the promise of grace and recognition that the ability to forgive is ultimately just as much a gift as being forgiven is. And, fortunately, we worship a God who absolutely loves to give us incredible gifts.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

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 trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from
evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen