

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Online participants, please put your answers in the chat. But in here, show of hands – how many of you have ever had to forgive someone? How many of you have had to *ask* for forgiveness? Which one was easier to do? Depending on the circumstances, both are hard, right?

Forgiveness isn't something we take lightly. As Christians, we know Jesus commands us to forgive. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our sins/our debts/our trespasses *as we forgive...*".

We offer forgiveness and ask for it because the relationships it affects matter to us. If the relationships weren't important, we wouldn't worry about forgiveness in them. We'd just treat the other person or people like garbage and move on.

And as we talked about last Sunday, because today's gospel reading is a continuation of a conversation between Jesus and the disciples, when we aren't concerned with how we treat one another, it harms and eventually destroys community.

And what Jesus emphasizes here is the importance of community and doing the work to not only maintain it, but to strengthen it and build it up.

At the beginning of this chapter, the disciples are arguing about who's the greatest. And Jesus flips their idea of what that means by talking about vulnerability – becoming like children, going to find a sheep that has become separated from the flock.

And he goes on to talk about how to reconcile with someone, the steps to take for that. And in our context, we remember that there are some situations when it isn't safe for someone to reconcile face-to-face, so if it's done at all, it needs to be done from a distance.

When we read about forgiveness in the Bible and, particularly, Jesus' command to forgive, it seems like we ought to be able to do it as soon as someone apologizes and then just move forward. And sometimes we can. It depends on the situation and how deep the hurt is.

And it would be nice if it *were* easy all the time. That's what Peter was getting at with his question – "Just seven times. Right, Jesus? Then I can check it off and I'm either good with the person or I'm not."

But there's more to it than that. And the parable Jesus tells to illustrate just *how much more* there is to it uses extreme examples. Which was the point.

Jesus starts by telling about a servant that owed a king 10,000 talents. To break that down – one denarius was a day's wage. And one talent was about 6,000 denarii – so, six thousand days' worth of work.

Ten thousand talents, the amount owed, was about 60 million denarii – or sixty million days' worth of work.

It was an outrageous amount, and the servant would never have been able to repay it. So, the king's generosity, mercy, and *grace* in forgiving that debt was equally outrageous.

The second servant owed a hundred days' worth of work. Still a lot of money, but like the number seven in Peter's question, it's measurable. And it's also very little, in comparison to the debt that was forgiven by the king.

So, it's no wonder that people were distressed and the king got angry when the forgiven servant refused to extend mercy and also forgive.

In this parable, Jesus goes beyond a technical question about forgiveness. He gives an example of a way of life, a way of being and thriving and compares it to the kingdom of heaven. God's realm of love and mercy. The community, the world, the *life* God wants for us.

And in the end, Peter is asking the wrong question. For Jesus, forgiveness isn't something you can quantify; in practice, the numbers "seventy-seven" and "ten thousand" are essentially *uncountable* quantities.

When we count something, it's because we want to keep track of it. It's a way of holding power over someone or a situation. But Jesus calls us to forget about the quantities, and instead embrace forgiveness as a quality of life – a way that guides us.

Because when we do that, forgiveness isn't something that we do but, rather, part of who we are. Givers and receivers of mercy. Children of God living by the grace of God.

¹Twenty-five years ago, the world was forever changed by the attacks on September 11, 2001. Immediately after, there was a sense of unity in our nation that hadn't been experienced in a very long time.

¹ Section on 9/11 and current state of the nation taken from: <https://www.facebook.com/jim.lynnch.1694>

People vowed to connect and to cooperate, to put aside differences. Even to forgive. But it didn't take long for that to change.

The unity gave way to fear and revenge and even hatred. People from a large portion of the world have been demonized and dehumanized.

Leaders and other public figures have been allowed to use those feelings and that language to shape the narrative around people of other countries, cultures, and ethnicities.

And as they've done this over the last twenty-five years, it has built up and we are living with the effects of vengeance, retaliation, and retribution. It shapes our current political situation here in the US.

And the hatred that the vengeance and retaliation cause targets anyone whose skin color is black or brown, simply because that's their skin color. It's directed at other vulnerable groups of people – specifically people who are trans and people who are immigrants. They are being targeted in our own state, and even in our own neighborhood.

We are often told, and *I* have said, that the teachings of Jesus are countercultural. Today's gospel reading no different. ²It focuses on the power of and necessity for forgiveness. It holds up a mirror to our society and culture, where revenge and control are given primary status. And where forgiveness isn't even an afterthought because it isn't thought of at all, or even considered, by so many of those in leadership.

³Throughout this chapter, Jesus entrusts his disciples with the work of seeking, confronting, listening, forgiving, binding, and loosing. They can't control each other, guarantee reconciliation, or keep every relationship from breaking. But they aren't powerless.

Because God's forgiveness doesn't only release them from what has already happened. It entrusts them with what happens next. And that's where it carries forward to us. Because God's grace doesn't only change what has happened to us. It changes what can happen *through* us.

Because when we live remembering that God has forgiven us, we recognize that that grace has transformed our lives – and through our lives, it transforms the world.

Asking how many times to forgive is the wrong question. Because, for Jesus,

² <https://www.facebook.com/jim.lynch.1694>

³ <https://micahkrey.com/2026/09/07/matthew-1821-35-16th-sunday-after-pentecost-september-13-2026/>

forgiveness isn't something you can quantify. Because when we count wrongs, it's because we want to keep track of them and hold power over someone or a situation.

It creates restrictions and limitations. It closes off our hearts, and doesn't allow for grace and the strength of its power to transform.

So, Jesus calls us to forget about the quantities, and instead embrace forgiveness as a quality of life – a way that guides us. We *are* able to do that because forgiveness begins with God. It doesn't come from us. It's rooted in God's grace.

And its power isn't limited to financial debt, or to big or even extravagant, acts of forgiveness. It also applies to our daily human interactions with the people who are closest to us. And, really, that's where it has the most immediate impact for us because they're the relationships that matter most.

It doesn't mean condoning the action that caused the hurt, or pretending it didn't happen. And if you're the one who caused the hurt, it doesn't mean thinking you get a free pass. You do need to apologize and ask for forgiveness.

When forgiveness is given, the relationship begins to heal. *People* begin to heal. That's its power. Sometimes it takes time, but each time it's asked for and received, its power grows.

As it does, forgiveness goes beyond something that we do and becomes part of who we are. Givers and receivers of mercy. Children of God living by the grace of God.

No longer worried about how many times to forgive but, rather, recognizing that forgiveness reveals how God intends the world to be.

Thanks be to God. Amen.