

Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity
November 4, 2007
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+In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit+

1 Peter Just Rec'd the Keys

In this morning's reading from the Gospel, what we have is the second half of the 18th chapter Matthew. Historically, the Church has considered Matthew 18 one of the more important places to go when considering the practical, nuts and bolts, aspects of challenging sin and forgiving sin. In fact, whenever there is any kind of a disturbance in the church, before it can be discussed openly, the question is always asked: have you followed Matthew 18? In other words, have you gone to the person? Have you brought along witnesses? Have you told it to the church?

Now, it was immediately after the disciples were entrusted with the special responsibility or office of forgiving sins that Peter asks the next logical question: Lord, how often do we have to do this? Is forgiving a person seven times enough? Peter's question is really a good one. After discovering that sin can be forgiven, how often it can be done is really the next important thing.

Peter suggests seven as the possible number that can be forgiven. When compared with Jesus' response, seven may seem a little stingy, but think about what Peter is saying. Suppose someone did something bad to you. Say someone purposely stomped on your toe. The first time it happened you would protest and the person who did it would ask for your forgiveness. You would give your forgiveness and that would be the end of it. Imagine if the next day the exact same thing happened again. You may once more be asked for forgiveness and you would give it. Now imagine if this happened seven days in a row. By the time you got to the seventh toe stomping, you would be infuriated with person

and ready to turn to violence rather than forgiveness. Punishing sin would be your concern and not forgiving sin. So, when you think about it, Peter's suggestion of forgiving up to seven times seems to be generous. At least it seems generous to us.

Jesus response to Peter is this: Not seven times but seventy times seven or as many times as the forgiving needs to be done. Whereas a person could possible keep the number 7 in one's head the number 490 is a little more difficult. Jesus' point here is that there is to be no limit on the forgiving of sin. Sin forgiving must be without limit. And, as a way of illustrating the point, Jesus teaches to his disciples a parable about forgiving.

2 Parable of the Kingdom: King settling accounts and shows mercy

There are two main characters in the parable. The first is the king and the second is the servant. From what we are told, the king was clearly a very generous person, who even lent the servant a large amount of money. In time, the king decided to settle his accounts and to recover his money from those who had borrowed from him. This was not a good thing for the servant because did not have the money to repay all that he owed the king.

By rights, the King could now do as he wished with the servant. At first, he ordered the servant and his entire family to be sold to pay off a portion of what the King was owed. However, before this could happen, the servant appealed directly to the king, he begged the king: *"be patient with me and I will pay back everything."* The servant did not in any way appeal to the mercy and graciousness of the king. Nevertheless, this is exactly what he received. Instead of being given more time, which really would have made no difference for the

sum was too large (1 talent per month. 10,000 talents=833 years), the servant was given complete and total freedom from his debt. He no longer had to pay the king one single penny. The servant was saved, his family was saved, and all that he owned was saved all because of the mercy of the king.

3 Forgiven servant does not show mercy and it gets back to the King

Immediately after being granted forgiveness of the debt, immediately after being shown such great mercy, the servant went out and found a person whom he had lent a relatively small amount when compared with the servant's debt to the King. Even though he did not need the money to pay off his to the king, the servant demanded the money that was owed. There is a role reversal going on here. The slave is now in the place of the king and this other man is in the place of the slave. The man could not pay his debt and like the servant he begged for more time to pay off the debt. What was the servant's response? Does he grant more time, does he cancel the debt? Does he show any of that mercy that we saw in the King? No, he does not. The servant grants neither freedom from the debt nor more time to pay it off. Showing the hardness of his own heart, he has the man thrown into prison until the debt is paid.

Just as this was taking place, another one of the king's slaves observed what was happening and he reported to the king everything that took place. The King hearing the news, called the servant back. To put it lightly, the king was very angry. Here he forgave the slave a real king's fortune and the servant, when put in the same position, except the sum owed was practically nothing, showed no mercy at all. The man's debt was then restored to him and he was handed over to suffer in prison. We know his debt was so large that it will never be paid off.

Jesus then concludes: *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.*”

4 Identifying the people in the parable?

Now this may have been a long way through the parable but it was absolutely necessary because we need to thoroughly understand what is going on. In this parable, the king is obviously, God, the father, and the servant is obviously each and every one of us. The servant is not just Peter, or one of the other disciples, but every person created by God and placed on this earth.

As we go through the parable, we can see Jesus pointing out the fact that God has given to everyone of us a great amount of wealth. God has in reality given to us everything. He has given us life itself. He has given us our family and friends. He has given us the food on our tables and the clothes on our back. Everything that we have in this world is nothing less than a gift from God given to us purely out of His Fatherly, divine, goodness and mercy.

Like the servant, we owe the King; we owe something to God. What do we owe to God? Look to the Ten Commandments and you will see. Look to the first table of the Law where are told to honor God above all things; to not take his name in vain, and to honor the holy day. What else? Look to the second table. Where are told: to honor parents; not to hate and kill; not to live unchastely or indecently; not to deceive or lie; not desire the things of others but to be satisfied with whatever God has given us. All these things we are to do happily and cheerfully with a sincere heart. The question is: do we do actually them? Do we follow the laws of God to the letter? We all know that we do not. We do not and we cannot because we are sinful children born of sinful parents. We are sinners.

We actually owe to God a perfect keeping of the commandments, but when it comes to carrying them out, we fall miserably short.

God has the right to demand from us a payment for this outstanding debt. Payment in full, like the servant in the parable for sins that should never be committed. God is right and he is just to demand payment from us for our sin. We are in over our heads, when it comes to sin, with no way out. Like the servant, we sometimes even try to barter with God asking for just a little more time to straighten out our lives, when the truth is no matter how hard we work it will never happen.

How does God respond to our situation? Does God demand payment from us for our sin? He certainly deserves it. But does He demand it? No, God does not. God does not demand payment for sin from us, but for Christ's sake, he forgives us our debts showing to us his mercy. He forgives us rather than punishing us for sins. And let us never forget, that the forgiveness we receive is not God merely saying: "it is okay. Forget about it." God forgives us only because Jesus Christ paid the debt for our sins. Our forgiveness does not come by a simple decree from God. We have forgiveness because Jesus paid the debt for our sins on the cross.

And it is at this point that you are put in the shoes of the servant. How do you respond to having our debt canceled? How are your lives impacted by the granting of this most precious gift of salvation and eternal life for Christ's sake? This is something each one of us must consider for ourselves. How does the forgiveness of sins impact your life and your treatment of those around you? How does the free gift of everlasting life influence how you use the material gifts

God has given to you? How does the knowledge that your time in this world is limited affect your view of the world?

5 Summary Conclusion

This parable challenges us to think carefully about questions like these. And let's be candid, what these questions end up showing us is our continued utter sinfulness, even as Christians, and how we still do not perfectly follow God's commandments. Thus, when St. Paul tells us: the things we don't want to do we do. And the things we want to do, we don't do, what he is doing is accurately describing to us the Christian faith. In this world, we are constantly at war with ourselves, with our own sinful flesh. This is our problem. Who can get us out of this mess? Only Christ and His forgiveness can do it.

And now you can see and, hopefully, more fully appreciate why God does not limit the forgiving of our sins. Why Peter's seven times is simply not enough. God does not limit forgiveness because: every second, of every minute, of every hour, of every day, we need to have our sins forgiven. This is the truth. In fact, for the same reason, God has given to things like Holy Baptism. To forgive us. Given us the Lord's Supper. To forgive us. Given us the Ministry. To forgive us. And most importantly why God has given to us Jesus Christ himself: to grant us the full, unlimited forgiveness of all of our sins. All thanks be to Christ. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen

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