LET'S LEARN TO FORGIVE

1. God's forgiveness
2. Our forgiveness

Remember what it was like to climb up into your parent's lap and have them read you a story? Most of us have also been on the other end of this togetherness time, reading a story to our children or other young relatives. We sure like a good story.

The portion of God's Word before us today is one of Jesus' best stories. There is drama, action, and sadness. But this is not just an earthly story. It captures a number of spiritual truths and presents them in such a way that we can put ourselves right into the story and gain this basic Christian lesson: LET'S LEARN TO FORGIVE.

Peter had listened closely to what Jesus just taught his disciples. Remember from last week's Gospel? Jesus instructed his disciples how to deal with someone who has done something wrong. We are to go to the one who sinned, point out the error privately, and forgive that person as soon as he/she repents.

That got Peter thinking: Okay, let's say I go talk to my brother privately, he admits he is wrong and repents, and I forgive him, but then he does it again?

Excellent question! Sometimes people repeat mistakes. According to Jewish law, you should forgive someone three times for making the same mistake. But after that, you can let him have it.

Peter, however, is starting to catch on to Jesus' teaching. He doubles the Jewish bid and raises it by one. Perhaps thinking himself to be rather gracious, asks, Shall I forgive my brother up to seven times before I let him have it? We can appreciate Peter's dilemma. After all, we expect people to learn from their mistakes, take a little responsibility, shape up already.

But Jesus sees where Peter is wrong and corrects him. Peter, forgive him 77 times. What, and then whack him if he does it a 78th time? No! Peter did not have that many fingers and toes. And it would be silly to carry a score card in his back pocket: Hey, you have done that to me 68 times, you only have 9 more chances and then look out! Or, You are only at 16, so I have plenty of time to plan my revenge on you. That is ridiculous! Jesus is teaching us all a huge, difficult lesson - let's learn to forgive.

So Jesus told a parable to drive home the point of ongoing forgiveness. There once was a wealthy, benevolent king who let his governors and other servants borrow from his treasury. One day he decided it was time to call in the loans. They brought in one man who owed the king 10,000 talents – that would be over $4 billion. Not many people could come up that kind of cash. It was an unpayable debt and back then you could not declare bankruptcy. They had this thing called debtor's prison: you stayed there till your debt was paid. If your family wanted you out, they would find someone else to borrow the cash from. But this debt was too big for even family to help with.

How angry would you have been if some careless employee told you he spent over $4 billion of your dollars? If the king did not take action, this servant would probably continue his indiscriminate spending. Word would get out that the kg was a softy and others would think they could do the same. Soon the whole kingdom would
be ruined. So the king asked for his money back.

Makes you wonder: how did this guy rack up such a debt? Without any shame he borrowed the king's money. He did not care. He just kept borrowing more and more. The king was a great guy. And besides, everyone else seemed to get away with it.

But then came the day of reckoning. He knew he was in trouble when those royal guards escorted him to the throne room at the royal palace. And how was he to answer the king's question? He could not pay, not $4 billion. With today's average wages, it would take him over 50,000 years to pay off the debt, not including interest. Try to imagine what went through his mind when he heard the words: Auction this man to the highest bidder. confiscate all of his belongings. Sell his wife and children into slavery. This was no time for self-esteem and dignity. He threw himself to the ground in an act of reverent worship. He even tried to buy off the king's anger: I'll pay back your money, just, please, be patient with me.

Then an unexpected twist. For an unknown reason, the king took pity on the groveling servant. Perhaps he knew what torments lay ahead for the man in debtors' prison. We do not know why but the king was filled with compassion. His anger over this great crime simply vanished. The verdict echoed off the walls: Cancel the debt. Let him go.

Do you get it? We are this servant. God is the king. By our daily sins we are guilty of borrowing against the treasury of God's righteousness. The Lord calls us to account for our sins. We cannot repay. So we deserve to be auctioned off to the only bidder who would want spiritually bankrupt humans - Satan, who wants to keep us for torment in his version of debtors' prison. Shall we try to buy off the Lord? God, what is it going to take to make things ok between us? I am really sorry this time. I will change, I promise! I will pay back what I owe. You'll see. I can do better. Just give me more time.

Well, God does not wait for us to start paying him back. God's law convinces us that nothing in my hands I bring. God himself cancels our debt of sin, completely, on his own accord, just because he took pity on us, just because he loves us, just because Christ already forgave our debt. And now Jesus wants us to learn to forgive others.

Imagine the scene. The servant walks out of the palace feeling great. I really dodged the sword this time. And then he spies a fellow servant: Hey, I loaned him 100 denarii last month. (That's about $4000) So he runs across the street and grabs the guy by the neck. Where is my money you owe me? You borrowed $4,000 from me and I want it back now. What do you mean you don't have it on you? Have this man thrown into the debtor's prison.

How do you feel toward the first servant? Indignant? How do you find him? Forgetful, vindictive, unmerciful? After all, the second servant probably could have scraped the money together in a short time. But no, the first guy had no compassion, no patience, no mercy. Let's face it, this guy is a real sinner.

And yet, he is a picture of you and me. How many times has this same thing happened in your home? Isn't lack of forgiveness a large element in sibling rivalry and marital conflict? There you go, doing just like you did last week. Or You don't deserve to be forgiven. People harbor resentment in their hearts. How many times has this same thing happened here at our church? Well, who
around you is not sinful and yet you expect them to do things just right? And when they
get under your skin, what do you do? You let it bother you. But you will not sit down and
talk it out with them. And even if you talked, an apology would not really satisfy you, not
unless they changed first. It would be just so much easier if they moved to another part
of the country so you did not have to look at them any longer.

But what did Jesus say? **Up to 77 times.** Forgive without keeping track. Forgive
as you have been forgiven. Harmony in your family and in your church starts in your
heart. Do not leave a problem unsettled. It will just fester until it breaks out into
something worse. Problems must be addressed. When you go to straighten out a
problem with someone, make sure you take along a forgiving heart.

The fellow servants in this story teach us another lesson about forgiveness. They
were grief-stricken when the unmerciful servant mistreated the second servant so
terribly. When we hold grudges against others or mistreat others, do we stop to think
how it affects our children or others who see us? My friends, let's learn to forgive as the
Lord has forgiven us. It glorifies God. It is such a better way to live, for those who wrong
us, for those we have wronged, and for those who see how we live.

This parable has a tragic ending, doesn't it? The unmerciful servant is
summoned, rebuked, and sent away to be tortured. What a picture of the final
judgment! The warning is clear: if you have come to understand how great a debt God
canceled for you through Jesus, you will not get away with holding a grudge. Failing to
forgive puts your own salvation at risk. Not forgiving someone else is equivalent to
saying: **I will conveniently ignore that God forgave me. I don't care. I want justice
for myself.** God will give such a person justice: he will throw him to the torturers **until
he should pay all he owes,** in other words, forever.

Fellow believers, let's re-write the ending of this story in our own lives. This
beautiful parable will accomplish what Jesus intended if we put its lesson into practice.
Let the record books of the heavenly King show that we have forgiven our family
members and our fellow Christians just as we have been forgiven by God. As long as
we are around other sinners, there will be many opportunities for us to forgive each
other.

Dear friends, because Jesus took your place in the torrent of God's wrath, the
Lord has forgiven the huge debt of your sins against him. Let's be Jesus to each other.
Let's cancel each other's debts. Let's forgive from the heart like the Lord. Amen.

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Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill