

# Trinity XXII

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[ 0 : 00 ] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Please be seated.

Many of us are very familiar with St. Peter's question about forgiveness to our Lord. He asks Jesus how many times that he is to forgive his brother that offends him.

He suggests that we should forgive him seven times, which is four times more than the ancient Jewish teachers suggested for those who intended to sin against us each time. In this instance, Peter would be suggesting that we be more gracious for forgiving others seven times rather than just three times.

In his mind, us righteous people should be forgiving the sinners, even the ones who sin against us, more than three times. Peter is like us in this way.

In that he assumes his righteousness in asking the question at hand. However, we read this instance after the fact and see this is ungracious. We should always forgive people who sin against us because that is what Jesus would do.

[ 1 : 12 ] In fact, I'm a very gracious person. I forgive people more than other people forgive me. I know that I've personally thought that before, and I can imagine that others have thought the same.

In order to provide us with more context, I'm going to read the gospel that I'm preaching from today. The gospel is St. Matthew chapter 18, verses 21 through 35.

Then Peter came to him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.

[ 2 : 18 ] Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him of the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.

And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servant saw what he had done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?

And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he could pay all that was due to him. So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

[ 3 : 21 ] There are several things that we can take away from Jesus' teaching in this parable. We can get a glimpse into how God forgives us. God is the one who doesn't forgive us seven times, a generous amount according to St. Peter, but rather 77 times.

This can be comforting to us, providing us with the knowledge that God is faithful to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we repent. However, it seems odd that the parable about forgiving an unlimited amount is followed by the story of one who is forgiven but decides not to forgive.

Wouldn't it have made more sense to have a parable that included multiple wrongdoings by the same person that were forgiven each time? That would have seemed to fit better with what Jesus teaches here.

Let me suggest that we think about Jesus' command to forgive 77 times, not as a matter of counting the number of times someone sins against us, but rather about the degree of offense with which someone comes against us.

Jesus is not merely saying that we must be ready to continuously forgive an offender, but rather we should forgive even those who we think has done something beyond our forgiveness.

[ 4 : 36 ] This parable is less about how much we should be prepared to forgive based off of our own righteous situation, but rather about our own experience of forgiveness leading us to forgive our brothers and sisters, being that our own experience of forgiveness is much greater than we could ever offer to someone else.

But this idea seems foreign to us. This is not the way that our world works. Surely we will forgive those who do small things against us, even if they do it a number of times. We can overlook things like that.

But if someone dishonors me, if someone slanders me, judges me, they do not deserve my forgiveness. So says our time and culture. If anyone stands in my way, inconveniences me, proves to me that they are not worth my time, that I am not going to offer them forgiveness, because they simply do not deserve it, even if they beg for forgiveness.

It is in this light that our parable makes the most sense. The servant who has an unimaginable debt against the master should pay his dues, but he asks for forgiveness.

His debt is an enormous amount of money. A single, a single, not the denarii, but rather the amount of things that he owed his master was 10,000 talents.

[ 6 : 00 ] A single talent was worth 20 years worth of wages for the average laborer of his day. That means that the servant owed the master 200,000 years of wages, a debt that would be impossible to pay.

The master forgives this man the amount of money when he asks for forgiveness. It's extraordinary. And we should see our own sin as this 200,000 years of labor that we owe to God because of our disobedience.

God, the one who is represented in this parable by the master, graciously forgives us of that debt when we repent. Our baptism has cleared our debt.

The current national plan to offer \$10,000 of student debt relief is nothing but a slight fraction of the amount that has been forgiven to us by God. Now, a denarius was a day's wage for the average laborer.

A hundred days, a hundred denarii is like a hundred days of labor, which is less than a third the amount of a single talent. The first amount servant is released from his 200,000 years of labor owed to the master, but then turns around and locks in prison the one who owes him less than 1% of what he owed the master.

[ 7 : 16 ] I attempted to do the math, which should be taken with a grain of salt. But the amount of debt that the second servant owed the first is 0.0000001% of what the first servant owed the master.

Not being aware of how much mercy the first servant has been forgiven, he approaches the second servant and starts to choke him, demanding that he be paid what he is owed. The debtor asked for his patience and said that he would pay him what he owed, but the first servant throws him in jail until he can pay him back the debt.

Well, the irony in this parable is striking. The first servant told the master that he would pay him back the debt, but that would have been impossible. He could not pay him back 200,000 years worth of wages in his lifetime, nor in a thousand lifetimes.

Yet, the master was gracious and he had compassion on him. But the second servant, who only owed 100 days worth of wages, could have paid back the debt if he was allowed the time to do so. But the first servant did not see that as possible. How dare he owe me this much money? I will not be patient with him. He must pay me back the debt, and I'm going to punish him until he can do so,

or get someone else to do it.

[ 8 : 34 ] Friends, the first servant was forgiven 70 times 7 when he was released of his debt. But the second servant was not even forgiven 7 times.

The number that St. Peter thought was so generous. And because of this, the servant was cast into prison because of his wickedness, because he failed to forgive his fellow servant. The first servant lived in prison forever because he would be unable to pay the debt that he originally received forgiveness of, but rejected that forgiveness when he refused to be merciful himself.

So my heavenly father also will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses. Brothers and sisters, we live in a different kingdom that operates by different rules than what we see in this world.

In the kingdom of Christ, we are equal. We are all made in the image of God, and we all have the same worth as each other. None of us deserve forgiveness more than anyone else.

In fact, none of us deserved forgiveness at all. But our Lord was gracious, merciful, and compassionate. He is compassionate to those who repent. Christ has given us a new nature in our baptism, and this power allows us to participate in the forgiveness that Christ had on us when he died and was resurrected from the grave.

[ 9 : 53 ] We are commanded to forgive, not because the trespasses against us are slight, but because we have a new source of life that we need to extend to each other. We must offer forgiveness to our brothers and sisters who offend us, because any forgiveness that we offer to others is less than a year's wage compared to what we owed God when he had mercy upon us.

Friends, let us look at how God has forgiven us our 200,000 years of wages so that we may forgive others the 100 days of wages that they owe us.

This is how the kingdom of God spreads, not by lording power over each other, but by dying to ourselves each day and by picking up our own crosses with one another.

Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy household, the church, in continual godliness, that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve thee in good works to the glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.