

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 18:21-35

The story is told of a driver in a big city who placed a note under the windshield of his parked car, which read: "I have circled this block for 20 minutes. I am late for an appointment, and if I don't park here, I will lose my job. 'Forgive us our trespasses.'"

When he came back, he found a parking ticket and note from the policeman that read: "I've circled this block for 20 years, and if I do not give you a ticket, I will lose my job. 'Lead us not into temptation.'"

So how do we forgive? In our gospel narrative for today, Jesus teaches us, that in receiving one another we must receive not only the one who wandered off, but also the one who sinned against us, the one who hurt us.

To receive one another, so the flock may be one, takes forgiveness. Jesus teaches His disciples, and us, about forgiveness, about God's forgiveness, and about our forgiveness.

But here comes Peter again. We can always depend on Peter to ask the question that we would like to ask, that we want to ask, but don't have the boldness to ask. Peter says in verse 21: "Lord if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

There are several theories as to how Peter got to the number seven. But it doesn't matter, other than Peter thought that seven times was more than generous, and ought to be enough.

You know how we sometimes say, when we are fed up with someone, whether it be a family member, or a friend or a co-worker, we say; "Enough is enough", I am done!

We mean that it's more than enough of what we can handle. At times our patience can wear so thin, that it might even have a hole in it. And then forgiveness is the last thought on our minds, if it can, even make its way into thoughts.

Personally, I think seven would be a lot. But hey, at least it was a rule. It was measurable. It was something Peter could do. Or thought or hoped or believed he could do.

So what is Jesus' reply to Peter generous proposal? Not just seven times. But seventy times seven. Four hundred and ninety! Jesus have you lost your mind?

Our patience would have a hole in it, a large hole because none of us would have any patience left at all. Who can keep this rule? This is impossible.

And that's the point. Jesus was not giving us another rule to keep. He was telling Peter, and telling us, about the nature of forgiveness.

There is no time for Peter to object. Jesus continues on, and explains about forgiveness in a parable.

Now let's look at verse 23, Jesus said: "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will pay you everything'. And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt."

When read this parable I was a little confused, why would a king, give his servant that much money? That makes no sense to me. But anyway.

A "talent" was a measure of money, and I believe it was equal to about 6,000 denarii and one denarii was equal to or worth about a "day's wage". So 10,000 talents would be 60 million days wages. That is more than 164,000 years, 7 days a week.

This is like you or me saying, I can pay off the National Debt of 20 trillion dollars, just give us some time.

Now let's go to verse 28. Jesus continues on by saying: "But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'

A hundred denarii, would be worth about 100 days of wages. That's reasonable, that debt could be paid in a short amount of time.

Now let's go to verse 30. Jesus continues on by saying: "But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you? And in his anger, his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay the entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to everyone of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'" (verses 30-35)

Here, Jesus shows us that God's forgiveness is great. 60 million days of wages! That is an enormous price.

Remember a number of years ago, a fellow by the name of Tennessee Ernie Ford sang, "Sixteen tons and what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt."

Now you and I may seen some deep debt in our day, but nothing as deep as this servant's debt, yet like Tennessee Ernie Ford, we owed our soul to (so called company store).

Our sin debt with God was deep, so deep we could never pay it. We owed our soul and then some. Yet, God's forgiveness is deeper still.

It cost God more than 60 million days of wages. It cost God the price of His only begotten Son. Like the servant in the parable that Jesus told, we don't grasp the size and the depth of our sin.

Jesus said from the cross: "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." We have no sin, so great or so deep, that His forgiveness does not cover it. God's forgiveness is deep.

God's forgiveness is also wide. In the parable the King forgives the debt of one servant. God's forgiveness is wide, and it is for all people.

It is for those of Jesus' time and before. It is for us, for you and me. God's forgiveness is for those yet to come.

God's forgiveness is wide, not just community wide, but world-wide. Jesus said in John's Gospel chapter 3, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son." God's forgiveness is for all.

None so evil, that he can't be saved, none so righteous, that he need not be saved. God's forgiveness is wide.

God's forgiveness is not only deep and wide, God's forgiveness is also over-flowing. God's forgiveness flows from God, it moves like a stream, it flows from Him to us.

God does not limit His forgiveness. No limit in depth, no matter the size of the sin. No limit in width, no matter who you are. And no limit in time, no matter what day it is, and no matter how many times before God. God forgives, and keeps on forgiving.

So where do we see God's forgiveness, deep, wide, and overflowing? Look in your Bibles. We see it in Moses, King David, Peter and the Apostle Paul. We see it in you and in me.

God's forgiveness flows to you and to me as well as to others. Forgive 490 times? No, we can't do that. Not in our own reason or strength.

But Christ says, in the closing verse (verse 35), to forgive our brother or sister from the heart. Is Jesus telling us to do something that we cannot do?

No. God's forgiveness is as deep as the spear which pierced Jesus' side as He hung dying on that Roman cross, which pierced His heart as blood and water flowed out from His body.

Christ's forgiveness flows from His heart to us. It flows to us in the Lord's Supper. It flows to us in His Holy Word, "I forgive you all of your sins."

It flowed to us in Baptism. As the Prophet Ezekiel writes in chapter 36, starting at verse 25, Ezekiel writes: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and you a heart of flesh." (verses 25-26)

The King threw the evil servant into prison, because the King's forgiveness had not reached him. It was outside of him. It had not reached his heart.

Theologian Frederick Buechner explains it in this way: "God's forgiveness is not conditional upon forgiving others, forgiveness that is conditional is not really forgiveness at all, it's just fair warning. What Jesus is saying is that the pride which keeps us from forgiving, is the same pride, which keeps us from accepting forgiveness, and will God please help us to something about it."

God has given His Spirit. God has removed our stony heart, and given us a new and living heart. His forgiveness not only flows from Him to us, it overflows from us to others. So what does that look like?

It looks like Renee Napier, who forgave Eric West, for driving while under the influence of alcohol and killed her daughter in a horrific accident. Did Eric go to prison? Yes.

But Renee did not let hatred and bitterness consume her. No, she let the love of Christ flow through her to Eric. Eric became a Christian, once out of prison, he and Renee, together, lecture across the country, against drinking and driving.

Was this difficult? Yes, because forgiveness can be very difficult, and it can be costly. It cost God His only Son, to die for you and for me, for Christ Jesus, to shed His holy and precious blood to atone for your sins and my sins. The price had to be paid, our sin debt, had to be paid, you and I could not or ever repay the debt, which would have meant eternal separation from God.

Only God in Christ could pay the debt! Our forgiveness to others can be deep by the power of God's Holy Spirit, when we come before God's throne of grace in humility, confess our sins, give it up to God, confess our own sinful pride, and strive in faith, to walk in God's ways, to seek Him and His guidance, and to live as Christ would have us to live.

Our forgiveness can be deep, wide, and overflowing. Forgiveness is not a suggestion, it is a command. It is a clear command to all those who call themselves Christians and follow Christ in faith. Therefore, let us do so. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, You are a God of grace and a God of mercy. We come before You this day, setting aside our pride, and humbly asking for your forgiveness, as we have failed to forgive others as you have forgiven us. Lord God, you looked beyond our sin, and saw something worth loving, even though we are unworthy, and that is what we are called to do in our daily lives. Lord God, help us to forgive as you have forgiven us, and to strive to be more Christ like to our neighbors in our daily living. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.