

When you're hurt by another person what do you do? You know, when someone offends, condescends, or humiliates you, how do you respond? Yell? Get even? Gossip about them? Sabotage their work? Go Terminator on them? This morning we're going to talk about how we react when we are hurt ushers in the Kingdom of Heaven, or not.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.[Ⓜ] ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.[Ⓜ] ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant[Ⓜ] fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,[Ⓜ] and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,[Ⓜ] until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Several questions come to mind as I read this Scripture. For example, why did St. Peter ask the question in the first place? In the last chapter Jesus told him and the other disciples that whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven, which was about forgiving people. Maybe he had a personal matter with another person that we was thinking about.

And I wonder why he asked if he should forgive “**seven times.**” Was it because he knew that was a godly number? But what about the eighth offense? Is that when I get to really let ‘em have it? I don’t think Peter thought that far ahead. I think he was guessing just because.

And consider his actual question: “**How often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?**” He’s talking about someone to whom he’s close, his “brother.” But what about his enemies? Jesus had preached in the Sermon on the Mount way back in chapter 5 of Matthew, “**You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**” (Mt 5:43-44). How easily we forget.

And then there’s the matter of the amount of money involved in the parable. The servant owed the king 10,000 talents, for which he was forgiven, and the servant was owed by his “fellow servant” 100 denarii, which he did not forgive.

Proportionately, this would be like me owing Bill Gates six million dollars, and he says don’t worry about it, it’s pocket change. But Troy owes me ten bucks, and I sue him on Judge Judy and have him thrown in jail!

Here’s a Bible study tip: When you study Jesus’ parables, look for the dramatic element in order to unlock the meaning of his teaching. The difference in the amounts owed by each party is that element.

INTERESTING INFORMATION

- One denarii = one day of labor
- 100 denarii = 4 mos labor = \$7,274 (10.50/hr)
- Repay one talent (6,000 denarii) in 20 years = \$436,440
- 10,000 talents = \$4,364,600,000
- Same proportion as \$10 to \$6 mn

So the wicked servant could’ve easily been repaid by his fellow servant, but he himself could never have repaid the king.

Consider how Jesus uses this analogy of relationships, a king to his servant, and servants to each other. There’s no relationship in which there’s greater distance

than between a king and a servant, and there's hardly any closer relationship than between two servants, persons who are socially equal.

As we read, the king judged the wicked servant severely for not showing his fellow servant the same mercy he had shown him.

Jesus said, **Matthew 18:35**, "**So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.**"

The crux of this teaching is that God demands that we forgive each other, keeping in mind how much more he's forgiven us. However, if we judge each other, he will judge us.

What Jesus says illustrates dramatically how our relationship with each other reflects our relationship with God. Which is to say, either we're like Jesus who commanded us to pick up our crosses and follow him, or we can be like the wicked servant, shouting, "Shoot 'em! Shoot 'em all!"

Jesus commanded his disciples to forgive "**from the heart.**" This is the centerpiece of this teaching. How often I have heard someone say, "I forgive but I will never forget." But God forgets. Our slates have been wiped clean. He has relieved us of our debt to him. Thus we pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

St. Peter wrote, **1st Peter 4:9**, "**love each other deeply, for love covers a multitude of sins.**" We are not loving each other "deeply" when we are pretending. This is passive-aggressive behavior, as in, "I love you now, but just wait until you turn your back."

When we love someone deeply we protect and serve them despite what has happened in the past.

When we're hurt and we want to lash out, the world says count to 10 or bite your tongue! But that's not in the Bible, as in "Thou shall bite your tongue when your brother offends you. For it is better to enter the Kingdom of Heaven with no tongue than to bare a grudge."

On other hand, we have a whole tool box filled with promises from the Bible. When we say the general Confession, we could remember those persons against

whom we hold a grudge and then we could receive the Absolution with thankfulness and faith, remembering God's graciousness to us as we extend the same grace to others.

When we come up to this Altar to receive Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine, we could remember his promise that this is for the remission of sins, and then we could offer this forgiveness which now flows from our hearts to the people around us.

Whenever we gaze upon this Baptismal Font we could remember our own baptisms, that when we were ushered into God's Kingdom, we were made into his children, that he lives in our hearts, and that he forgives us unconditionally so that we can forgive others unconditionally.

When we look upon this Cross we can remember what Jesus did for us, and then in sorrow for our own sins and in gratitude for God's forgiveness we could extend this grace to those who have hurt us.

One of my most effective devotional tools is to start my day with prayer, praying specifically for relationships which are causing me problems. Perhaps there's someone in your life who's mean or condescending or cruel?

I remember working with a very difficult character when I directed an academic program a few years ago. I was absolutely miserable. I couldn't cross this person's path without coming away ruined for the day. I started to hate my job. It was depressing. But then one day I had an ah-ha experience, and I started praying for that person and myself every morning with something like, "God help me to have a good day, and bless my relationship with John." And things changed.

My experience has been that when I pray for the people in my life God is present in those relationships. And things change, usually me. God gives me patience, and peace in my heart, and I have what is needed to be his emissary in the relationship I have been troubled by. The Lord takes control and leads me to conduct myself in a way which is pleasing to him. This is what Jesus was talking about when he compared the Kingdom of Heaven with a king who had boundless love for his servants, even those who squandered his treasures.

Friends in Christ, this week let us be honest with ourselves and with God about the grudges we hold against others, and let us start forgiving and forgetting, growing in our relationship with God as we do.

This week let us let God transform our hearts using all the tools he's provided in worship and his Word that we may become living emissaries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And this week let us take the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.