

Sermon Title: “The Elephant in the Room, Part 2”

September 13th, 2020 – 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 18: 21-35



Theme:

What's in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In last week's Gospel message, we heard about how Jesus views greatness, that we need to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ, be empathetic toward them, and that Jesus is with us anytime two or more of us are gathered in His name. In other words, the Church is not the building, but the people. While we may occasionally have conflict with each other, Jesus gave us a framework for working it out, to include the “Power of the Keys” (the authorization to forgive sins and withhold forgiveness – something that only God could do up to that point). Jesus also stressed that we should only expel someone as a last resort. This should only be done when someone clearly will not repent of his or her sin and refuses to follow Jesus.

As this “Power of the Keys” has got to be very difficult for the Disciples to even process, Peter asks the question, “How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” Jesus' answer is now known as the “Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.”

So, in this parable, we have two servants and a king. The first servant owes the king 10,000 talents. That's 200,000 hours of work, or approximately \$3.48 Billion in today's currency. Working at 40/week, it would take you 416 years, 8 months to repay that debt. Now back then, there was no such thing as bankruptcy protection. If you couldn't pay your debt, you either went to prison, were executed, or more likely you or your family members were sold off into slavery. About 75% of the population during Roman times were slaves. Even professionals such as doctors were sometimes slaves, such as Luke. So, servant #1, owes the King \$3.48 billion, and there's no way on earth he can pay that back. He knows it. The King knows it. Everybody knows it. So, what does servant #1 do? He goes to the King and begs for mercy and forgiveness, claiming he just needs a little more time to pay it back. Who is he kidding? He's never going to be able to repay this debt and everybody knows it. This king has a heart and

forgives this massive debt. Gone. Servant #1 has received quite a blessing, so what does he do? He runs across Servant #2, who owes him 100 denarii, which is about \$45.00 in today's currency.

Servant #1 demands that Servant #2 repay the debt of \$45.00, which is his legal right to do so. As both of these servants are likely already slaves, they can't be sold into slavery again to pay off an additional debt, so Servant #2 is sent to prison. Prisoners were totally dependent on family members and friends to provide them with meals while in prison, so the chances of dying in prison are extremely high. This is essentially a slow, agonizing death sentence for Servant #2 over \$45.00.

When the King gets wind of this, he recalls Servant #1 to appear before him. The King is angry that Servant #1 failed to show mercy to his fellow servant after he had been shown mercy himself. So, the King reinstates the debt and sends Servant #1 to prison as well.

So, what does this all mean to us? Different translations of the "Lord's Prayer" use different words to capture the meaning. Some versions say, "forgive us our 'debts' as we forgive others," other translations use "sins," and others use "trespasses." We have all racked up \$3.48 billion worth of sins that we can't atone for. No amount of good works will ever atone for that debt. Jesus, though we didn't deserve it, atoned for that debt on the Cross. He had mercy on us, forgave us, and then He gives us the "Power of the Keys." Why did He do that?

Jesus is trying to teach us something about the heart. He gives us the power to forgive sins in His stead and the power to withhold forgiveness. Keep in mind, Servant #1 had the legal right to collect that \$45.00 he was owed and seek legal recourse to get it. When our brother sins against us, Jesus is giving us the legal right to withhold forgiveness, but if we do so, what does it say about us?

Withholding forgiveness, or holding a grudge, does more to us than to other people. It eats away at us and leaves us bitter. Conversely, when we do forgive, it is like a heavy weight has been lifted off of our shoulders. We no longer have to worry about it, and we can move on with our lives. No more looking over our shoulders. It also honors and respects the Savior who paid that \$3.48 billion debt that we owed. When we forgive, we get a glimpse into the mind of

Jesus and when we do something out of free will, instead of compulsion, it reveals our true heart.

So, how is your heart? Is there someone you need to forgive? I know I've mentioned it before, but I'll mention it again. We commune baptized believers who believe that Jesus is truly present in the bread and the wine, are repentant of their sins, are not holding grudges, and have been instructed in the significance of this meal. If there is someone, you need to make peace with, do that this week, then come to the Lord's Table next week. Receive that forgiveness that Jesus wants to give you and experience the joy it is to forgive others.

While St. Paul was not present during this Parable, He understood what this means and how to respond appropriately. When Paul was in prison, a slave from Colossae escaped and was caring for Paul. Onesimus, the slave, was owned by the Philemon, who provided the home for the Colossian Church to gather in and worship. Paul was concerned for the well-being of Onesimus and being an escaped slave was a capital offense. Philemon had the legal right to have Onesimus executed, but Paul does something amazing, sending Onesimus back to Philemon, with a personal letter from Paul. I recommend that you take the time today to read it. It's the shortest book of the Bible. In it, Paul tells Philemon to transfer any debts Onesimus incurred to Paul's account. Paul gets what Jesus is saying in this chapter. When we show mercy and forgiveness to others out of free will, instead of compulsion, we not only respect the Savior, but we learn to be more like Jesus.

Here at Faith, we have a unique 4-in-1 Ministry - Church, School, Childcare, and Community Center. We have a unique opportunity to model the life that Jesus would have us live, to include the compassion and forgiveness that He first showed us. As we begin a new school year, we have a unique opportunity this year to plant seeds as we welcomed many new students to Faith Lutheran School this year. We also said goodbye to some students who will carry the fruit that was planted here to new places and hopefully plant new seeds there. I see

great opportunities for new students to hear the Gospel for the first time. What an opportunity!

We can teach a whole new group of students to look at the world not through a legal lens of “I have the right to do . . .” but instead look at the world as, “I get to love people. I get to forgive.” “I get my brother back.”

Last week, I talked about two painful examples from our history where we weren’t as forgiving and reconciliatory as we should have been and the lasting repercussions from holding those grudges. We have an opportunity to turn the corner. Seminex doesn’t have to be the defining moment of the LCMS, or even Faith Lutheran. If there is someone or something that continues to bother you about this congregation, I encourage you to reach out this week in Christian Love and unity and forgive your brother and ask for forgiveness. Conflicts do not have to tear us apart. The Disciples fought and argued frequently, but they were there for each other when it counted. We can be there for each other too. We can choose to be defined by our mistakes, or by our love for each other and our Savior. That is the greatest key Jesus could give us.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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Quotations from Scripture come from:

Various Authors. *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.