

Forgiveness: for reflection and discussion

Prepared by Lyn Heine and Dan Spragg

Reading - Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ 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.' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ 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. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Questions for reflection and discussion

Watch Rev Lyn Heine tell a story from the Courtroom of the Texas Walmart Mass Shooting case.

Consider the comment from one victim statement that considered the impoverished condition of the offender – the damage he had brought to his family resulting in no family present at the trial; the support provided being paid professionals to guard and protect him; and the judge's comment that his mission had failed – he did not destroy this people, he did not conquer their love, he did not bring overwhelming despair. Certainly they grieved and sorrowed. Certainly they expressed anger at the waste and loss. Yet also certainly they knew the way forward for their lives included some sort of reaching out, some sort of touching, some sort of expression of forgiveness.

- What would I have done?
- What would I do?
- What would each of us do?
- How do we face tragedy, and what do we bring to trials?
- How does Jesus' overarching call to love impact us in these situations?
- This is a situation that not many of us (mercifully) have to experience. What can it teach us about love, grace, and the light of the gospel, as we confront people and situations who have wronged us?

- In the New Testament, the majority use of the word forgiveness translates from the Greek as “let go”. How does this impact your understanding of forgiveness?

A Prayer

God, forgive us for the times when we haven't lived as our best selves.
As we forgive those who have acted or spoken wrongly toward us,
Forgive us when we haven't been very loving and forgiving towards others.
May we learn to be more patient and gracious,
Just as we would like others to be patient and gracious toward us.

Help us not to react in moments of irritation or frustration,
Forgive us when we haven't taken a moment to gather all the information
so that we can respond instead of reacting out of impulse.
Yours is a vision of a life-giving, shared world,
yours is a purpose of equal shared power,
and yours is a priority of empowering, shared glory.
Forgive us when we have been greedy with the earth's resources,
When we have manipulated with power games,
And when we have hungrily sought glory.
May we remember that we are all created in your image, God,
With a heart of compassion like Jesus,
And a fire of passion like Spirit, Amen. ¹

¹ Attributed to John van de Laar.