

Sermon Matthew 18 21 35 13th S af Pent

Sermon: 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matt. 18:21-35 (vv.21-22): The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Theme: “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.”

Goal: To reflect God's mercy in our daily life.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: This text is totally against our nature. We usually don't handle people this way as Jesus recommends. Peter must have been chocked, frustrated or ashamed with the answer Jesus gave him. He thought that seven times would be a good figure to forgive his fellow. *Mercy is not a normal reaction among human beings, especially in case of offense. Sometimes we might not even know our actions: tone of voice, choice of words, body language and the like. We get irritated or hurt. We become angry. Such ill feeling can drive a wedge between us, between spouses, friends! Anger weakens our relationship. How difficult it is to overcome such feeling! Anger is at the bottom. (LCMS p. 121).* The problem is our tendency to retaliate rather than to forgive. “*An eye for an eye*” is the common rule. *It affects our relationship in marriage, family, work place, friends, and so forth (LCMS A, p. 120).*

How does this text affect our reactions and our daily life?

I – The unmerciful servant

Before Peter could react to Jesus' answer to his question, Jesus told them the parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

The amount that the first servant owed to the king was the equivalent to 100 million denarii. One denari was the wage for one day of work. His fellow servant owed him only 100 denarii. There is a huge difference between the two amounts.

Both servants begged for mercy and patience to pay back their debts, the first one to the king and the second one to his fellow servant. Neither of them was able to pay their debts. I think that the first one would have never been able to pay back his huge debt. The king knew this and canceled the debt. The king listened to the plea of his servant and had mercy on him.

But, on the other hand, the first servant didn't have mercy on his fellow servant and put him into prison.

When we hear this story, we agree with the king when he reviewed his decision and removed his previous forgiveness, putting the first servant into prison. *We are disgusted at how a person who has been treated with excessive grace can fail to show a small amount of grace to another* (ABC 1147). But when we think about the teaching that is behind the parable and how it affects our daily life, several question marks come to our thoughts. What about us?

We pray in the Lord's Prayer: “And forgive us our sins (our trespasses, our debts) as we forgive those who sin against us”. And do we really forgive others always as we pray? Shall God handle us the way we handle others? It's a hard situation to manage...

Jesus says at the end of the Lord's Prayer: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”(Matthew 6:14-15). And at the end of this Parable Jesus says: “This is how my heavenly Father treats each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

II – The merciful God

Luther puts himself as a beggar before God when he explains the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: *And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

We are unable to be merciful by ourselves, without God's mercy. The prophet Jeremiah wrote (Lam 3:23): “Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassion never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness, Lord”.

Have you ever thought about how big our debt is before God? If we count one sin per day only, I myself have lived more than 22,000 days! And we know that we sin more than once a day... And how many times we want to be forgiven by God? ... “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults”, says the psalmist (19:12).

God, in His mercy, is always ready to forgive us for the sake of Christ. We cannot pay anything of our debts; but *our debt to God had to be paid. Jesus paid it, down to the last cent* (Series A, p. 206). Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:8): “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect.” And Peter (1 Peter 2:23-24) wrote about Jesus' reaction when he was suffering: “When they hurled their insults at him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by His wounds you have been healed.”

Here is the fountain from where we come to drink and receive forgiveness and strength to forgive others as Jesus forgives us. *Our forgiveness is empowered by God's forgiveness* (Series a, p. 206). As we ask for forgiveness daily when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we

confess our sins also at the beginning of each Service: “...*I, a poor sinner, confess to you all my sins...*” And we come to the Holy Communion, where we receive the body and blood of Jesus, “shed for forgiveness of our sins”. And we believe that “the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sins”, as John confesses in his first letter 1:7. If we miss the opportunity to receive God's forgiveness, it becomes more difficult for us to forgive others.

Conclusion: The story of Joseph of Egypt, as we heard in the Old Testament lecture, is a good example. His brothers had treated him badly when he was young, selling him into slavery out of jealousy. Now that the old father Jacob passed away, the brothers were fearful of Joseph; maybe he would take revenge... They came to Joseph, who was the second in command in Egypt, and asked for forgiveness. Joseph answered them: “Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? (this means: to judge you?) You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” (Genesis 50: 19-20). And Joseph took care of his brothers. (LCMS A p. 121).

When we use an alternative Order of Service, Pastor invites for the Confession saying: “*Since we are gathered to hear God’s Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner. ...*”

Only in God's mercy for the sake of Christ we find strength to be merciful to our fellow as well. God grant us this blessing. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 11th September 2011