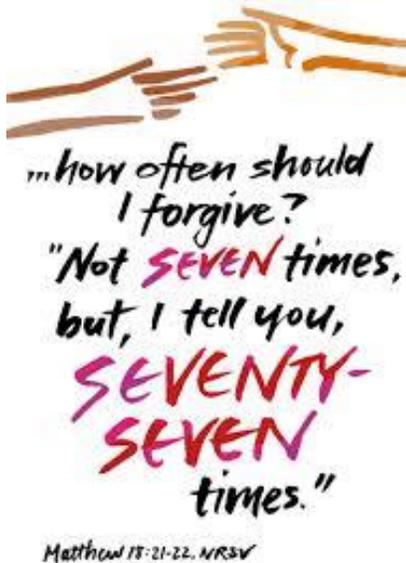


Lectionary Bible Study Our Savior Lutheran Church

Lectionary 24

Readings Readings and Psalm

Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103:8-13;
Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35



[Click here](#) to join Pastor Mark for a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am.

Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554

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Matthew 18:21-35 (NRSV)

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church 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."

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, his 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."

The previous passage, Matthew 18:15-20, outlines a detailed process for resolving conflicts within the community. The assumption is that there will be conflict within the church. The question is how will conflicts be resolved?

1. Have you ever been part of conflict in a community of faith? Was it resolved? How was it resolved?

Peter doesn't seem to question Jesus' advice/teaching, but he does seem to at least be looking for a loophole when he ask how often should one forgive.

2. What do you think is behind Peter's question? Can you relate to Peter's questions?

Jesus answer of forgiving "seventy-seven" times is meant to be an exaggeration not to be taken literally.

3. *What do you think is the point of Jesus exaggeration? How would your answer the question today of how many times should you forgive?*

We often use, or at least hear, the phrase "forgive the sinner, but not the sin." But what happens if the sinner remains either unrepentant, or caught in a cycle in which "the sin" seems systemic? Another phrase we often use, or at least hear, is "forgive, but don't forget," which implies caution should measure how we practice forgiveness.

4. *Considering the two phrases above, what do you think about the popular quote that "To err is human, to forgive is divine?"*

As Jesus often does, he employs a parable to illustrate his teaching on forgiveness. Again, Jesus exaggerates to emphasize his teaching. A "talent" was equal to 6,000 denarii; and a denarius is the coin used to pay for one day's labor. So one talent is approximately 20 years of labor. Which makes the slave's debt about 200,000 years of labor. So when the slave falls on his knees and begs for "patience" from his master, he is making an impossible request.

Nonetheless, the king opts to forgive the large debt. However, by turning around and not forgiving an insignificant amount owed to him, the forgiven slave, in effect, mocks what the king has just done (and does it in a mean-spirited way).

5. *Which surprises you more, the king's forgiving an exaggerated sum of money, or the behavior of the forgiven slave?*

When it is brought to the king's attention what has happened, namely that the servant mocked the king by not mirroring paying the received forgiveness forward, the king responds in a way to restore the honor of the king. Notice here that the slave is not forgiven "seventy-seven times." The king responds in kind as the king considers the relationship that exists (or does not exist) between the king and the servant.

Apparently, forgiveness is much more than "a get out of jail free card." Through the parable, Jesus is calling us to give up calculating offenses and forgivenesses; and instead to have a forgiving heart; a forgiven heart; a heart for forgiveness. This is a shift of attitude; but it is not an "anything goes" attitude.

6. Do you think experiencing forgiveness for yourself demands sharing forgiveness in the same way?

7. What are we saying when we pray, "forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others"?

Forgiveness is a beautiful thing to receive and to give, but it is hard. Following Jesus' example is impossible, but it must be aspirational. Thank goodness God's forgiveness has the last word for us. But that last word also carries with it the expectation that we model God's forgiveness anew.