

Sermon for Trinity 14 (13/09/2020)

The minimum wage cleaner owed the owner and CEO of the international fortune 500 company he worked for £11million. Wanting to be sure of his assets before the next audit the CEO called upon the cleaner to settle their debt. When the cleaner could not pay the CEO decided to pursue legal action, seizing the man's house, car, and many possessions including those of his wife and children. The cleaner came to his boss and begged for patience. Seeing how upset the man was the CEO decided to forgive the man his debt.

Having been forgiven his debt the cleaner went out and met with his colleague who worked alongside him. This man owed the first man £1000. The first man demanded his money be repaid but the one who owed him could not pay and begged for his forgiveness... the first man attacked the second demanding his money and then reported him to debt collectors...

Our gospel portions this morning talks about forgiveness. The parable itself creates a startling picture... It paints a picture which without too much of an imaginative leap applies to each one of us, how much we have been forgiven and how much we ought to forgive.

The numbers I used in my retelling are deliberately disproportionate, in the original text they are equally remarkable. For a slave might only see a single talent/denarius in a whole year of working so for someone in that position to owe tens of thousands was beyond understanding. The second debt is still large but much more manageable...

Nothing shocks us more about this parable than the cold heartedness of the first slave. Having been forgiven so so much- more than he likely would have ever been able to repay he cannot forgive someone who owes him relatively little. Not only can the first slave not see what has been done for him and reflect on it and his own actions but also, he loses out on time to celebrate his own release from debt. There is no celebration from him- such a lot has been wiped away, yet he can only focus on what is owed to him by another. It seems almost unimaginable that we might ever behave in this way and yet... forgive is such a complicated thing.

The implication of this morning's parable is clear. God is the King to whom such a great debt that is beyond all imagining is owed. We are the first slave who owes so much and is forgiven... only to act so utterly obtusely if we do not forgive others in response.

Peter asks Jesus how many times should he forgive? Seven? Jesus replies Seventy-Seven... The numbers here aren't important just like the amounts of money in the parable aren't significant other than in comparison with one another. Seven is a holy number. So Peter is almost asking should I forgive in a Holy way? Jesus replies by multiplying that number upon itself several times... the reply is yes but more! Don't just forgive in a way that seems holy... but forgive beyond counting. Forgive absolutely.

We should give wholly and completely because no matter what we forgive it won't be comparable to what we have been forgiven. God's forgiveness is significantly more than our own, it has reshaped the world. Forgiveness is what reshapes the relationship between humankind and God from one debts and payments to one love and openness via the shape of the cross. We the Church are a community of

people acutely aware of all we have been forgiven and this awareness should prompt us to forgive in return.

The Church is designed to be a uniquely loving and forgiving community of people. It is meant to be characterised by the humility, repentance and LOVE of its members. The Church is not meant to be a fortress for the perfect or for those who think themselves perfect... Which I know we are not. Striving to love and forgive is an ongoing process. I'd also like to make it clear that forgiving does not mean accepting the unacceptable. There has been in the past misuse of this passage to keep people in situations which are no good for them. Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery but told her to change her situation. Forgiving a former abuser or bully does not mean submitting to them again. Forgiveness should be a liberating and life-giving thing, if it isn't then there is something that mostly likely needs to change.

Forgive is life giving not just for the person receiving but for those who give as well. The perhaps a little over used phrase is that not forgiving is like drinking poison but expecting the other person to die. We will all face times where forgiving some will make no difference to them... they may not even know you're upset or angry... and they may very definitely NOT deserve to be forgiven. But we deserve to forgive them. Because it will bring us life and freedom.

The Lord's prayer says forgive us our sins as we forgive others... the expectation of God is there... our map for how to pray is to ask daily for forgiveness but also to ask daily for help to forgive. There might be people in your life you have struggled to forgive. Or people's who name on social media drives you a little mad... forgiving them does not mean entering a situation where you have to be subjected to their agenda or even to interact with them. It means being free yourself. Imagine for a moment, the man who owed millions of pounds. What a weight that would have been for him and his family. Daily pressure. The joy it would have sapped from everything... now if he had stopped to realise he was forgiven rather than focus on his anger with another... if he had forgiven the other... no pressure of worrying if he'd be paid back. No nagging thoughts of need to make repayments... imagine the celebration that SHOULD have been had... that's what God wants for us. That's what we can embrace as individuals and as a community when we chose to forgive. Amen.

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