

The Unforgiving servant:

This morning we heard Jesus teaching his followers what it means to forgive those who have offended us – to beg forgiveness from those we have offended – and the price to be paid if we abuse the graces of those who have bestowed their mercies upon us.

Jesus's followers had been expecting a simple answer to their question about how often we should forgive someone.

Maybe a handful of times – at most?

But forgiveness is not quite so simple.

In the parable Jesus shared with them, the first servant had accrued an immense debt of 10,000 talents, today worth roughly 375 tons of silver. Worth over \$200M in today's market.

An insane debt. Virtually impossible to repay.

It's very hard for me to wrap my head around what kind of lifestyle that servant might have led, to run up such a massive debt to his boss.

And yet, his Master had taken mercy and forgiven him all of it.

Yet, he wasn't the least bit humbled by his having been forgiven, and he hadn't learned a blessed thing by it.

The second servant, in turn, had owed the first servant a mere hundred denarii, worth a few months' manual labor. Worth maybe about \$14-15,000 today. Not impossible to repay over time...

He had been expecting similar leniency from the first servant but was greatly distressed when that wasn't to be the case.

For the first servant, it wasn't sin that the Master had forgiven, but the insurmountable debt that he had owed. The Master had hoped that his servant might have learned a valuable lesson.

The Master had shown immense compassion, loving your neighbor as yourself. But the first servant had been oblivious to that message and had shown zero compassion toward the second servant.

When the first servant was called before the Master the first time, it was to account for his poor lifestyle choices and financial decisions.

When he was called before the Master the second time, it was a whole different ball game.

This time, it was about his heartless mistreatment of his fellow man, about his total disdain and contempt for those he considered as beneath his station.

If we ourselves haven't learned how to improve our relationship with God and our brothers, sisters – then we haven't learned anything either. We haven't earned God's mercies.

Forgiveness is awfully hard to give – or to receive. It's not like we can just brush the fallout – the repercussions – off our sleeves – and continue our lives as if our offending behavior just simply never happened.

We all have old sins that we can't seem to forgive, or to let go of – and yet, we also seem to keep coming to God each day asking the Lord to forgive our sins. Sins we keep repeating. Sins we just can't seem to release our death grip on.

Forgiving the actions or words of others is painfully difficult to do.

The same with asking for forgiveness...

Forgiveness seems to come with a lot of strings, and yes-buts.

“I'll forgive you, but only if you...”

We can grow increasingly angry and bitter with people when they won't apologize or ask our forgiveness.

And sometimes they feel like we are simply just building mountains out of mole hills.

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we recite the verse, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

Always easier said than done.

It's that final sentence from our Gospel this morning where it all gets really sticky!!

Jesus said, "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother – from the heart."

But life is a lot more complicated than that, isn't it?

OK, a friendly warning!! A sensitive subject...

When somebody causes malignant, intentional physical – psychological – or emotional harm – - - traumatic and irreparable harm to ourselves... or to those we love, it becomes impossible for us to just ignore.

A rare few parents do abuse their young children... a known fact. A few children do abuse their elderly parents... And a few spouses do abuse their spouses... Vulnerable people who ought to be able to trust their family members.

And it feels impossible to find it within our hearts to forgive such evils.

Their stories are ones we would really rather never have to hear.

How can we possibly forgive such intimate assaults???

God may certainly be able to do so – but we aren't wired the same way as our heavenly Father.

We are not all-knowing or all-seeing the way the Lord is.

We are not capable of knowing God's plan for the person who has caused such evil harms. And maybe that's a good thing.

All we can do is to try our very best... to talk daily with God about our anger and our desire for vengeance – and pray that he will forgive our failures.

We are, after all, merely human.

We face uncomfortable human emotions.

Anger – fear – hopelessness – a demand for retribution – and remorse.

Fortunately – and mercifully for us, our Father in heaven isn't burdened by these human traits.

The Lord so wants us to grasp our frailties, our shortcomings...

Our failures to love him, to love our neighbors, our brothers and sisters – and to show them the same mercies we would hope that the Father might bestow upon us.

Forgiveness doesn't come freely.

It doesn't come without obligations to make restitutions. To make noble efforts at repaying our debts.

But it can lift the weight of the world off our shoulders.

And it can earn us a place with our Creator now – and when we go to be with him in the next world. In the house he has prepared for us.

Who do we need to forgive?

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