

091723 "Let the Grace of God Lead Us!" Matthew 18:21-35

A traveler was looking for a room and he found a motel nearby.

A clerk said, "Would you like a 40-dollar room? or a 50-dollar room?"

"What's the difference?" he asked.

"Well, room is the same basically but you can get FREE WIFI with a 50-dollar package."

In fact, people love freebies but there are no freebies.

In our daily lives, there are many cases where we take it for granted when in fact someone is working very hard. For example, fire fighters sacrifice so much to keep our community safe. Every day police officers sacrifice so much to protect and serve our community. Sanitation workers keep our streets clean. Their efforts and sacrifices make our community better. Daily or maybe weekly are you aware of that?

One day Peter came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Well, Peter thought seven times would be very good enough. It was the rabbi's teaching that you must forgive three times. Peter understood this idea, and being very generous, he doubled it and added one more for good measure. So he asked Jesus what he thought: "Up to seven times?" I am sure he expected to be commended for his generous attitude.

But Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy seven times." Wait a minute; every one says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have someone to forgive. It is not easy to forgive even once if one committed an offense in reality and maybe three times for the saints but seventy-seven times?? What this means is not just 490, but without limit. That sounds impossible!

Then, Jesus told a parable of the unforgiving servant to his disciples.

Matthew 18:23-25 said, 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 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.'

We care about how many times we shall forgive, but Jesus is talking about our enormous debts that we don't even know about.

In order to understand this parable, it is good to know about the value of 10,000 talents. According to an ancient historian, the annual budget of the Jewish government/society didn't exceed 1,000 talents at that moment. So the debt is more than ten-year budget of the government! Classical historians usually say one talent equals to 6,000 denarii. 10,000 talents equal to 60 million denarii. One denarius equals to a daily wage for an unskilled laborer and common soldier. Connecticut's minimum wage is \$15 per hour. If we calculate that a person works 8 hours a day, we can say that the minimum daily wage is \$120. Then 10,000 talents equal to 7.2 billion dollars! Of course, it is difficult to calculate accurately because today's price and the price at the time are different, but roughly calculated, you can get this amount. It's not just "lots of money!"

Let's think about this way! He was a servant, right? A servant owed \$7.2 billion? I just do not understand the situation itself! Which master would be willing to lend that amount of money to a servant? Moreover, a servant needs that money for what? So here is a thought: this man's debt was infinite, and it is impossible for him to pay back! That's the point Jesus was trying to make. That's the reality he faced!

I've always thought that this parable is all about forgiveness and we struggled with this idea. But this time as I read this story, I realized that maybe that's not the main point here. The main point would be what God had done for us not what we should do to earn salvation. Then, actually I prayed, "Oh God, I know you have showed me mercy but never thought that I owed you that much or you paid that much in order to save me! You paid it all for me?" We should not take it for granted.

The unforgiving servant received unlimited mercy from God but he didn't care about it until the master dealt with it according to law instead of mercy. His heart had not been changed in any way by his master's grace. Although the debt was relatively nothing, he showed no mercy. How about us? Are we

aware of what we received? Do we really understand the heart of the Lord?
Do you still feel moved and touched by the love of the Lord's cross?

Psalmist said in Psalm 40:12, "For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, until I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails me."

In the New Testament, Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, which means, "missing the target." We came from God and will return to God. Our life should aim the target, God the creator but because of sin people keep missing the target and sometimes denying God and saying, "What do you have to do with me?"

Today I'm not trying to say, "Folks just forgive!" I believe forgiveness follows as we experience God's grace first. Once God's grace changed our heart and life, then we live a forgiving life by the grace of God. Not because you have to, but because the grace of the Lord will guide you and provide you.

A first grader wrote a note and left it on his mother's dresser.

It was like a bill actually.

"I took care of younger brother: \$2

My room cleaning: \$2

Shoe shinning for daddy: \$2

Errand charge for mommy: \$2

Got 100 percent on math test yesterday: \$5

All together: \$13."

And he wrote at the end of the letter or bill, "Money due tomorrow! (Sorry, no grace period!)"

He came home after school with expectation.

And yes indeed, he found an envelop on his desk.

He opened it and found a letter instead of money.

It said,

"Son, I kept you in my womb for nine months. I bear lots of pain. But.....

It is FREE.

For last six years I fed you and dressed you: FREE

In your sufferings I kept awake for night after night and once I held you in

my arms and went to E.R. at dark night: FREE

Last week you and your friends were playing baseball and our neighborhood had a totally shattered window to replace: FREE

Future school expenses for you: FREE

And she wrote at the end of the letter,

"Son, I have nothing to charge you with. I do still love you!"

After reading this letter, he went to his mommy and gave her a BIG hug!

He gave the letter to her and she found a note on it, "I love you, too. Paid in full. You are dismissed!"

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, how do you come before God today? Maybe like the first grader before his mother, do you come to God?

'Oh Lord, I came to church despite a bad weather. What can you give me?

I do believe better than others so what is the deal?

I do tithe sincerely even though others don't. What kind of blessing can you give? I've never missed a service or a meeting. What can I get?'

They are great but what would God say when we come before God like this?

'Life and strength I give you. It's FREE.

Air to breath and water to drink I provide. FREE.

Forgiveness of your sin. FREE.

I sent my beloved son Jesus to redeem you from your infinite debt. FREE.

I do still love you!'

Please remember, before you forgive, you are forgiven. Compared to our own infinite debt, this is really small. Jesus paid in full! God loves you!

Forgiveness is not something we can do on our own. That being said, today's sermon is not about forgiveness but about God's grace, which is abundant beyond our expectation. When you experience God's grace and acknowledge how precious you are because of this, God will also provide strength, and change "impossible" to "I'm possible." Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, with your family, with your business, with your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.