

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As a kid growing up, I stepped out of line many of times and have gotten in trouble for doing so. As a result, I have been punished in so many different and various ways. As I reflect on it, I think the worst punishment I endured was my mom telling me that I really disappointed her. I can't even remember what trouble I had gotten into when she said that...all I remember is her saying to me, "Mark, you really disappointed me." I can still hear her saying that to me. Nonetheless, she forgave me. My own kids and grandkids have been "knuckleheads" at times, they have disappointed me, although my newest grandchild is still too young to disappoint me but give her time, I'm sure she will, and just like the others, despite the disappointment, there will be forgiveness. Disappointment by definition is that sad, dissatisfied feeling you experience when your hopes, wishes, or expectations do not match reality. Disappointment almost always brings frustration, sadness, hurt, or even anger. However, it does expose what one truly cares about, which can make you feel raw or exposed and from here is where we either sit in the disappointment and anger or we forgive and move forward.

I mentioned my mom, my kids, and grandkids because I can only imagine the frustration and the letdown God feels when looking at the disappointment of His creation and the price God has paid to forgive us. That price being God's only Son Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, we know without a doubt that God's love is extravagant. And God's disappointment in each of us is overcome with the love that is fully manifested in the death and resurrection of Christ. In this extraordinary act of love, God has won the forgiveness of sins for all believers and releases us to be *people who forgive others as we have been forgiven*.

Today our readings take our thoughts and perhaps our prayers in the direction of forgiveness, along with patience, hopefulness, and seemingly endless forgiveness. Today we are encouraged to forgive one another as Jesus says, NOT seven times but seventy-seven times. But looking out our window on the world, we see the times in which we live, and the evil that invasively exists so openly and blatantly in the world. Nonetheless, this worldly condition of sin and evil needs to be reckoned with by more than just pointing it out to others in order to make ourselves feel better.

So, is it possible to truly forgive in this day and age? We cannot just point to the world out there and say the evil is out there, or that sin is out there...this world...out there that we shake our heads and wonder about, is our fallen situation. There is NO "them" and "us" it is our fallen situation. We live in a fallen world. We are all part of a fallen world. The evil and suffering that is all around us...is who we are. There is evil being done at the hands of our humanity through terror, war, and hatred. And we preachers attempt to comment on the tragic state of our existence...but to often end up looking superficial or even foolish¹ by pointing to the prayer, we pray so often:

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

¹ Forgiveness for an evil and fallen world inspired and "borrowed" once again from, Reverend Gregory P. Fryer, Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY in his sermon delivered on 9/11/2005, Pentecost 17A.

I think most preachers see the futility or the ineffectiveness of this petition of the Lord's Prayer. Nonetheless, this prayer is a pleasant attempt for preachers to encourage this forgiveness and mercy as we beseech the Lord to forgive our sins as we forgive others, but more than that, the goodness of this forgiving notion within this prayer becomes a way of keeping faith alive on earth in the midst of all that is going on in the world around us. It does this because when we understand that we cannot forgive as we have been forgiven, it takes us to the cross, the ultimate act of forgiveness found in the death of Jesus Christ. This prayer then becomes a light in the darkness of sin and suffering. It is from our inability that we learn of God's frustration, sadness, hurt, and even anger for us. But Jesus Christ on the cross exposes that God truly cares about us and is willing to go this far for us. And in this love for us we are sent to forgive, despite our disappointment, to forgive as we have been forgiven.

The parable of the unforgiving slave that is before us today is misleading, in that we assume that all *I HAVE TO DO* is forgive as I have been forgiven. If the parable only causes us to ask, what must I do, then we are missing the point. Great is the forgiveness of this debt in the parable but we see quickly that forgiveness, true forgiveness is more than wiping the debt off the books...forgiveness, true forgiveness, is a continuous act, but even this does not happen in this parable.

From the very start of the Gospel lesson today we hear Peter ask Jesus, how often should I forgive, as many as seven times?" Jesus reminds Peter, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times." Then we hear that the kingdom of heaven *may be* compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And here is where the wheels fall off for us because we tend to make God the king in this parable. If Jesus is teaching us about God and the Kingdom of God, let's not forget that forgiveness is to happen seventy-seven times. In this parable, as much as we like the slave who could not forgive to get what is coming to him, we see the king or God as we assume the king to be, only forgive the indebted slave *once*. While the king shows incredible mercy when forgiving the slave his debt the first time, forgiveness doesn't happen for the slave when he could not forgive the other slave that owed him and the king has him handed over to be tortured.

The Good News for us in this parable, is that forgiveness, for God, is never a completed act...yes, Christ died *ONCE* on the cross for our forgiveness, but that forgiveness continues. Forgiveness from God is a continuous or an ongoing action. I have to tell you, if God is really like this king within this parable, then I am in big trouble because I have disappointed so many more than seventy-seven times and have much more than seventy-seven sins. But I know we have a merciful God because we see it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness extended to us all through Jesus Christ, is the embodiment of continuous forgiveness.

There is a certain delight in the unforgiving slave getting what is coming to him when he does not show the mercy that he was shown. But that's our delight that draws us into the retribution of the unforgiving slave. But this parable is not told to delight us, this parable shows us that our concept of forgiveness is certainly not God's concept. This is to say that God is not the king, because we like to think that God would destroy those "who owe us." And in this thinking, we play the role of the king simply by our assumptions about this parable. The delight we take in the retribution within this parable, shows us that, we have the inability to forgive as we have been forgiven, the inability to fully understand all that is given to us and then to see what has been given to us

extended to others. Luther wrote in the Large Catechism concerning the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer that says forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors. Luther writes in the catechism,

“This should serve God's purpose to break our pride and keep us humble. He has reserved to himself this prerogative: those who boast of their goodness and despise others should examine themselves and put this petition uppermost in their mind. They will find that they are no more righteous than anyone else, that in the presence of God all people must fall on their knees and be glad that we can come to forgiveness. Let none think that they will ever in this life reach the point where they do not need this forgiveness. In short, unless God *constantly* forgives, we are lost.”²

We tend to think forgiveness is when we have bent over backwards for someone seven times or seventy-seven times. But the parable shows us what happens to forgiveness when we think it is completed...forgiveness ends. The king bent over backwards to forgive a massive debt, and then it ended, forgiveness did not continue from the king. But God's forgiveness does, through God's disappointment in us, God gives more...God gives Jesus Christ to continuously forgive us all and free us from the debt of sin and death. And we literally see this continuous forgiveness over and over every time that bread is broken and a cup is lifted in God's Holy Name and handed to us in this Holy Meal.

The parable of the unforgiving slave, in all its extravagance...with all the exaggerations, can only be fully understood in light of Christ's death and resurrection and this shows us what God does to forgive us and not what we do to gain our forgiveness. God's forgiveness for us is embodied and made known when Jesus gave up his life for all the sins of all the believers of all generations in all the world...an act that continuously forgives us...who have gathered here...right now...around this Word and this Holy Meal of promise and forgiveness.

We have disappointed God, but God's profound grace reveals His love that is freely given to all. Through Jesus Christ, God has forgiven all our sins and has healed all our infirmities; God has redeemed our lives from the grave and in God's mercy and lovingkindness...crowned each of us with life everlasting.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

² Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2000. “The Large Catechism, The Lord's Prayer, The Fifth Petition” page 452, par 90-91.