

Pentecost 15A / Proper 19  
 September 17, 2017  
 Rev Ken Wratten at St Luke's  
 Genesis 50:15-21  
 Romans 14:1-12  
 Matthew 18:21-35

The parable of the unforgiving debtor sounds harsh and cruel; but within this story is a life lesson we all need to study. All of our lessons today have to do with handling forgiveness, and not judging others. That's a hard assignment. I was not brought up to forgive. My father was more the model that if someone wrongs you, they no longer exist. So this has been a hard lesson for me.

Our decision to be People of God raises us higher than only holding the faith that God exists, or that God cares about us, or even that God loves us so much that He forgives us when we goof up. Our living for God includes a call to have a spirit of forgiveness toward other believers when they hurt us. This call for forgiveness is core to our faith. The Romans and Matthew passages both say there is a link between God forgiving us, and us forgiving people who do wrong by us. The Lord's Prayer has us say: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us'. God's forgiveness of us is connected to us forgiving each other. God wants us to have His heart beating in us, to act like God acts, in loving and forgiving.

God expects that we hold human relationships to be something sacred; worth asking the other person for forgiveness and worth forgiving the other person.

I spent ten years doing consulting work in electrical engineering. That work meant spending many, many hours in my home office running computer simulations and writing involved engineering reports for my clients. I saw myself become better and better at it, and I made a lot of money. I decided I had enough money sitting in my checking account that I should have an investment manager handle it for me. When the dot-com debacle started, I asked him if we should change our investments, or pull out. He counseled that this was a temporary bump in the market, and I should hang in there. We had that discussion at least six times over four months, and at the end of that time all of my investments, all of that time spent generating that income that was to be my guarantee of a comfortable retirement, was completely

gone... For a few years I was angry... very angry, and depressed. Then I decided that even though this might change my retirement plan, hating the person I trusted to watch over my earnings was not going to change anything for the better. I forgave him. He doesn't know that, but it doesn't matter that he doesn't know. The act of forgiveness was about releasing me. It released me to see that there are plenty of blessings at work in my life, and God is always bringing good out of the bad.

Jesus said to forgive each other beyond calculation. The monetary value that the first servant owed the king was ten thousand talents. One talent was the wage of a manual laborer for fifteen years. Ten thousand talents represents 150,000 years of income. So the debt that the king forgave the slave could never have been paid. The King's response to the slave's limitless debt was limitless forgiveness. God's response to our limitless debt is limitless forgiveness.

Are there debts others owe you that can never be repaid? I'm not talking about money... Are you holding onto some debt so tightly that there is no room left for God? What impact would forgiveness bring?

The point of the parable is that we should not even count the number of times we forgive. It is not about math, but about having a spirit of forgiveness that pervades our lives. Jesus' message to forgive without counting is not a rule – as in a regulation; but it is to be a rule of life for us; a way to measure our own spiritual journey. Taking on forgiveness as a holy habit, invites God to operate at an entirely higher level in our life.

Paul told the people in Rome that we are not meant to live for ourselves. We live for the Lord. Higher than anything else we might not agree on, living for God is the overarching principle we are to live by. Making forgiveness a rule of life puts God first. Commit yourself to have the heart of God beating in you. Amen.