

Coop's Scoops # 101 Sunday Sermon and Liturgy

Sentence: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 13:34

Readings:

Exodus 14: 19-31 Psalm 114 Romans 14:1-12

Collect:

Almighty God, you call your Church to witness that in Christ we are reconciled to You. Help us so to proclaim the good news of Your love, that all who hear it may turn to You. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The Gospel for Today: Matthew 18:21-35

²¹Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, 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. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had

mercy on you?’³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

The Sermon:

Jesus teaches us some difficult truths in the parable we have from Matthew this morning. It is not just a simple story with a very scary ending. It is a complex representation of how we are to live in the Kingdom of God in the here and now. And without careful thought, it can leave us with disquiet, even fear in our hearts; leave us thinking about those people in our past or present who have wounded us so deeply that even contemplating forgiveness makes us both squeamish and angry. We might wind up leaving this sacred time thinking that there is a hammer over our heads screaming “Forgive or else!” And so we need to unpack it and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to look at things in ways that lead to peace through love.

So let’s get the data in context. The servant owed the King a huge amount of money...more than 150,000 years of wages! How it got that high is not talked about...but this fellow can never ever repay what he owes. I’m going to call this guy “Frank”. It’s easier to use names when there are two characters in the story. Frank has been called to account, and is about to be thrown, along with his family, into debtor’s prison. Desperate, he cries out for mercy. Totally undeserved. Yet the King graciously decides to forgive and forego what was owed. Frank is set free to go. As he leaves, shaking his head in astonishment at what has happened, he runs into somebody who owes him money. Not a huge amount, but considerable at about 100 days wages. I’m calling this man “Harold. Harold can’t afford to pay it back either, and is headed for the same debtor’s prison that Frank has just escaped. Harold begs for mercy. But just-forgiven Frank closes his ears and his heart and tosses Harold into prison. Some folks who knew what had just transpired with the King could just not believe it. They carry the news back to the King. The King is outraged. Frank is called back. The mercy is

also taken back, and the prison doors open. And this time, on top of that, the King orders Frank to be tortured. Frank, in the end, is worse off than if the debt had never been forgiven at all. The story, however is not yet over. and the servant is called back, the mercy is taken back, and the prison doors open. This time, however, the King adds torture to the torments. The man, in the end, is worse off than if the debt had never been forgiven at all. The story, however is not over. Jesus tells Matthew (and all who believe) that God will do likewise to them if they do not forgive from the heart those who have sinned against them. And that is terrifying for us. For we know that there are those things which we have not yet forgiven, or there may be new wounds for which we just cannot muster up forgiveness. We realize that when we do not forgive, and we pray “Forgive me my sins, as (in the same way that) I forgive those who have sinned against me” we are actually praying that God should not forgive us at all.

We now enter tender territory. What are we to do when we cannot forgive? Well, not pretend. And not flee. We can pray that it become our heart’s desire to forgive, and ask God’s Holy Spirit to help us get there. We must depend upon the mercy of God, which is extravagant, unending, not quantifiable, not limited to a 70x7 equation,,,,,to forgive us while we grow in grace and mercy. How do we grow? Paul tells us clearly. He wrote “Owe no-one anything but love”. He also said that he considered himself a debtor to all men, because he had not yet had the opportunity to do them all good.

That is the vocation of everyone who bear’s Christ’s name. And Paul again gave us the method for growing in grace “ Present your bodies a living sacrifice which is your reasonable service, and don’t be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds”.

Forgiveness may indeed be required, but it can never be commanded or forced by any human authority. It is intensely personal territory. As most of you know, I spent many years working alongside police officers in the most horrific of circumstances. Many times, after repeated calls, we would help a woman and her children into safety only to have a well-meaning but spiritually abusive Pastor come along and tell her that her husband is sorry,

and he repents, so she just has to go home. And so she does. And way too many times, the next time I saw her was at the scene of her murder. We need to have a better understand of what “forgiving” actually means.

Forgiving does not mean trusting. WE are always to wait to see the fruit of repentance, goodness, kindness, love, self control and so on before we **ever trust mere words of repentance** from someone has hurt us. And we must NEVER demand that abused children trust their abusers. Or insist on reconciliation between any two people who have a history of on-going antagonism and wounding.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. Forgiveness means knowing exactly how evil a sin against us has been, and deciding to not hold that person responsible to **our** judgement but rather let go and leave that person to God’s judgement alone.

Forgiveness does not mean excusing or permitting additional abuses against us. And LOVING does not necessarily mean LIKING. We can love someone and still keep our distance lest our presence tempt either of us into more sin.

Forgiveness, however, is freeing! When we get to that place, we can move on and never ever have to return to the prison of vengeful desire. Forgiveness allows us to breathe out....we are not made to breathe in the grace of God and hold our breath...we are made to breath out and let that grace fall upon everyone on our path. Whether or not forgiveness is merited, whether or not forgiveness is asked for, whether or not we “feel” like it....forgiving others is the one debt we all have to the Lord who has forgiven us.

And about the “torture” thing.... We all know how it is to be constantly revisiting a time of wounding; hearing and feeling it all over again, figuring out all the things we “should” have said, plotting how to see to it that whoever hurts us gets hurt back, or saying all the “if only’s...” for the hundredth time... That to me is “torture”. And the only way I know of to stop doing that is by forgiving the one who has sinned against us; releasing them and what they have done to God; and asking the help of the Holy

Spirit to stop (transform) our minds from going back there again. God is faithful. He also will do it. And we will be free. As, indeed, shall they. (Need help with this? Give me a holler!) Amen. Judie+

Prayer for Today: *(from CatholicOnLine)*

Faultless Lord, enduring death for me, You have consummated the debt of my sins: Your sacrifice of forgiveness was absolute!

Grant me the strength to also forgive others,

To absolve their transgressions against me. And so that I may truly reflect this spiritual fruit, obliterate any persistent feelings of malice. Let each trespass end as a closing chapter, and begin anew my continuing on the road of righteousness. Forgive my sins as I long and hope to forgive others.

You are a most forgiving Lord! For all your mercies, I give You praise!

Amen.

Blessing:

Each morning as you arise

May you have:

God's power to guide you

God's might to uphold you

God's eyes to watch over you

God's ear to hear you

God's Word to give you speech,

God's hand to guard you

God's way to lie before you,

God's shield to shelter you,

God's Host to secure you.

(first millenium - bridgid of gael adapted jc)



God be merciful to me a sinner, and to all who sin against me. Amen.