

Matthew 18:21-35  
“In the Kingdom of Heaven”  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday af. Pentecost

September 12-13, 2020  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Vicar Don Stein

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What’s it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Christ’s Kingdom, the one that is “not *of* this world,” yet very much present *in* it.

What’s it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Christ’s Kingdom, the one that has come *in part*, and will come *in fullness* soon.

What’s it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?

What makes it different from *worldly* kingdoms?

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[*Debt in a worldly kingdom.*]

Today Jesus teaches us that the chief difference might be... in ‘debt-management.’

Debt is a regular part of life in a *worldly* kingdom.

Whether we need a car, a house, a way to eat or go to school—debt is the way!

And, oh! Do we have to work to pay it off! As the rhyme goes:

*“There ain’t no rest for the wicked; money don’t grow on trees.*

*We got bills to pay, we mouths to feed; there ain’t nothin’ in this world for free.”*

That debt must be paid back.

Either by you, or your descendants, or someone in a different tax bracket.

Debt is not forgiven in a *worldly* kingdom.

“Money makes the world go ’round,” as they say.

[*Debt in the Kingdom of Heaven.*]

But that’s not how it works in the Kingdom of Heaven!

Debt is still a regular part of life in the Kingdom of Heaven...

Whether we’ve ignored another or actively wronged them—“sin debt” comes our way!

And, oh! How blessed we are that God doesn’t require us to pay off those debts!

Despite our wickedness, God invites us to pray as we do in the Lord’s Prayer:

*“Forgive us our trespasses...”*

Or as some translations put it: “forgive us our *debts*...” And God is faithful!

Your debt was wiped out—*forgiven*—when Jesus paid it on the Cross.

His precious Blood was poured out on you and your descendants and all the world.

Debt is forgiven in the Kingdom of Heaven!

*“Forgiveness makes the world go ’round,”* Christ would say.

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[*Forgiveness is the way.*]

In today’s Gospel reading,

Peter was starting to understand what things looked like in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Peter didn’t quite know how all the pieces fit together just yet, but he was close.

He knew *forgiveness* was the way of the Kingdom, but where were the limits?

“Lord,” Peter asked, “What’s it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?” though not in so many words.

His actual words were:

“How often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Peter is on the right track. (Jesus didn’t say “Get behind Me, Satan!” this time!)

And Peter’s basic idea sounds fair: forgive, but don’t become a doormat!

Forgiving someone seven times for the same sin? That seems more than fair.

If anything, that seems generous!

Yet Jesus ups the ante: “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Translating Greek to English can be tricky, especially with numbers.

Some Bibles say seventy-seven times, some seventy times seven (490, I did the math!).

The point is the same: *Forgive all the time.*

*Forgive without ceasing.*

*Forgive without care for how great the “sin debt” is.*

*Forgive, period. Because you have been forgiven.*

And just in case Peter doesn’t get the point, Jesus tells a parable to pound this idea home.

A servant who owes 6,000 drachmas—*the equivalent of 60 million days’ worth of labor!*  
...is forgiven.

His master had *compassion* on him!

The servant was forgiven his truly unimaginable, unquantifiable, unpayable debt.

One would think this servant would have a new appreciation for forgiving debts,  
but you know the story:

The servant turned right around to his fellow servant,  
who owed him 100 denarii—about \$10,000 nowadays.

(That’s not insignificant, but it’s *nothing* compared to his own debt!)

The wicked servant demanded his money back, and then some!

He choked his fellow servant, threw him to the ground, and then into jail.

And, of course, when the master found out, he threw the wicked servant into jail!

And then Jesus finishes the parable...

He says something that should make us all take a good, long look in the mirror:

“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you,  
if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

*This is the Gospel of Our Lord.*

That doesn’t sound like Gospel, that sounds like a threat!

Yet the truth of the matter stands: refuse to forgive, and you forfeit your place in the Kingdom!

Refuse to forgive, and you face self-imposed death, hell and damnation.

Jesus could not be clearer:

Forgiveness is the way of the Kingdom; *there is no other way.*

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*[Your debt has been paid.]*

How many grudges have we held?

How many times have we withheld forgiveness?

How many times have we held on to a debt, and placed ourselves outside the Kingdom?

*How often do we forget “What it’s like in the Kingdom of Heaven?”*

Peter wanted to know “What’s it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

He had already been told.

*Jesus had explained* that the Kingdom of Heaven was all about forgiveness.

*Jesus had explained* that He had come to bring God’s forgiveness to the whole world.

Peter wanted to know “What’s it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

He should’ve understood.

But he didn’t.

And he wouldn’t—not yet, anyway.

Peter wouldn’t understand, when His Lord was taken away.

He wouldn’t understand, when His Lord was hung on a Cross.

He wouldn’t understand, even when he saw His Lord’s empty Tomb three days later!

Peter only understood, when the Resurrected Jesus reminded him of his mission:

*To forgive others’ sins.*

At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, the disciples were all gathered together in fear.

Jesus appeared to them.

“Peace!” He said.

Then He sent them into the world, to forgive others’ sins. (Matthew 28:16-20, John 20:19-23)

And to Peter... He turned, and said: (John 21:15-19)

“Feed My sheep.”

“Tend My lambs.”

“Feed My sheep.”

Then Peter understood.

His mission was to remind those sheep and those lambs

who were holding grudges

and withholding forgiveness

and holding on to debts

and placing themselves outside the Kingdom...

to remind them of where they belonged.

He was to remind them “What it’s like in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

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We share that mission!

Through His death on the Cross, Jesus Christ forgave *all* the sins of the world.

*Even our failure to forgive.*

Peter needed to be reminded.

We need to remind each other constantly.

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*[Forgive, as you have been forgiven!]*

What's it like in the Kingdom of Heaven?

It's like being reminded of your Baptism.

It's like receiving Christ's own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

It's like going to Private Confession,

to hear the pastor announce God's Holy Absolution just for *you*.

*It's forgiving, as you have been forgiven.*

Christ forgives undeserving debtors in His Kingdom of Heaven!

And He empowers us to go out and do the same!

This is such Good News, it ought to be shared.

In fact, we ought to have a day to "Rally" around it!

We ought to do as the Psalmist says:

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**Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen!**

**(Psalm 96:3)**

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And that's how we'll end each sermon this year.

We will:

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**Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen!**

**(Psalm 96:3)**

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