

September 20 2020 Worship at Home Lect A

Good morning – welcome to worship

Gather everyone in your household together this morning. If you are not alone - assign parts of this beforehand. If you don't have a Bible you can google the scripture readings and print them out too. Perhaps print out copies of this for everyone present. This Liturgy is from the ELW book. Prayers are from Sundays & Seasons.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Sit in the quiet for a bit – take some deep breaths. Light your candle.

The Gathering

Call to Worship

Call to the Lord, who hears our prayers.
Wait for the Lord, the source of our hope.
Sing to the Lord, who delights in our songs.
Let us worship.

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Hymn: ELW 733 WOV 771 - Great is thy faithfulness

Prayer of the Day: Tender-hearted God, you show perpetual lovingkindness to us , your servants. Grant us your merciful judgement, and teach us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen**

The Word

Jonah3:10-4:11

Psalms145:1-8

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 18: 21-35

The sermon has been written by **Rev. Adam Snook** Assistant to the Bishop, Eastern Synod.

Then 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?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

'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. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But 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." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

I have always enjoyed reading. From whimsical story books about the little-engine-who-could, or saying goodnight to the moon as a child...to pouring over great Canadian fiction, or the classics, on a Saturday afternoon in the summer. Reading is one of my favourite hobbies.

As a teenager—I became quite attracted to those *Choose-Your-Own-Adventure* books. You may recall them! Essentially, and if you're not familiar: at any given point in the book you would be presented with a choice to make: *Should you open the rattling door....if so, keep reading. If not, skip to page 71. Or, would you like to climb the mountain in search of the legendary lost treasure...if so, keep reading. If not, skip to the final chapter.*

That sort of thing...you get the idea.

I so enjoyed the suspense of these books. I appreciated their creativity. But perhaps most of all, I valued the fact that if you didn't like the ending...you could simply go back to the beginning, make a few altered choices, and craft something completely different. Something a bit more appealing.

In this morning's gospel reading from Matthew (the story of the unforgiving servant), we encounter a parable about a King who wished to settle his debts. The story begins with the King demanding repayment from a servant for the outstanding balance of Ten Thousand Talents. **It's an absurd amount of money!!!** One talent alone was the same as 130lbs of silver...and would

have taken a servant 15 years to earn: which means that 10,000 talents was equivalent to 150,000 years of labour. It's incomprehensible. So unbelievable, in fact, that early Greek manuscripts would often reduce the number to make it a bit more palatable. **But the absurdity is critical to the story.** It would have been impossible for a servant to repay such a debt, we know that. So, and with no real other choice, the indebted servant pleads for forgiveness—and the King, who was excessive in severity, also chooses to be excessive in mercy. He forgives the debt, forgives the loan, and forgives the servant.

But this is where things get complicated.

Because it seems that such excessive mercy is lost on the servant. In turn, he quickly denied forgiveness to someone who owed him a far smaller...far less significant amount of money: only about a day's wage (in comparison to 150,000 years). It's a cringe-worthy turn of events that leaves the reader shocked and confused. The parable closes ominously with the unforgiving servant being handed over for punishment, and a stern warning for those who follow after.

Needless to say that when the parable of the Unforgiving Servant rolls around in the lectionary cycle, I find myself wishing that I was back in Jr. High school...wishing that I was reading one of those choose-your-own-adventure books and somewhat able to alter the outcome.

I don't like this one.

I want the servant to be so moved with gratitude—that he cannot help but to live a new life.

I want him to be so moved with gratitude—that he cannot help but to skip through the streets in joyful praise.

I want him to proclaim forgiveness...and to proclaim mercy...and to proclaim love from the very rooftops that nearly came crashing down—to everyone, and for everything.

I want the outcome to be different!

Sounds good, doesn't it?

But you and I both know that forgiveness isn't always easy.

And that's why, I believe, this parable is so important. Because, and as much as I might wish to identify with the king in Jesus' parable, the truth of the matter is that (most days) I'm sitting right next to the servant with the absurd amount of debt. The one who can't dig themselves out. The one who need forgiveness. The one who messes up. And the one who struggles to forgive others in return.

Sound familiar?

And so let me ask you a question: what if...what if, instead of trying to shy away from the depth of this passage...what if, instead of trying to re-write or avoid it's weight—we alternatively choose to lean into it...to embrace it!

Embrace the truth—that we can't do it on our own.

Embrace the truth—that forgiveness is more than just some nicety or kind platitude.

Embrace the truth—that we ARE going to mess up.

Embrace the truth—that for most of us, forgiveness is a struggle...a challenge.

Because, and it occurs to me, that when we do so (when we lean into all of our worries and fears surrounding this portion of scripture), what we will quickly discover is that forgiveness is not primarily God's expectation...but rather, that forgiveness is first, and is foremost, and is forever God's gift. And that even when such forgiveness may not seem possible for you...and certainly feels insurmountable for me: we can still be comforted by the fact that such forgiveness **IS** possible for God.

And that, dear friends, is GOOD NEWS.

Because God's unbelievable, nearly inconceivable, amazing, absurd, and utterly astounding forgiveness—changes everything! Everything!

Now that, gives me hope.

And I pray that it may inspire you, also!

You know, about the same time I was reading those choose-your-own-adventure books, I also started working at Lutheran Camp Mush-A-Mush in Nova Scotia. I remember sitting in the chapel early one morning, as the visiting pastor spoke about forgiveness. Truth be told, and while caring for a cabin of eight-year-old boys who were more concerned with throwing rocks at one another than they were with listening to the pastor (shocking, I know!), I really didn't hear much. BUT I do recall her yelling...at the top of her lungs so loudly that it echoed across the lake with crisp clarity the words: YOU ARE FORGIVEN!

I mean...she belted it out! But even more memorable than her words, was the feeling I felt after hearing them. In that moment, I felt free and unencumbered. In that moment, I felt inspired and hopeful. In that moment, everything seemed possible.

Siblings in Christ, God's beloved, hear these words when I repeat them to you (words that, I pray, you have heard time and time again throughout your lives:

You...are loved! You...are forgiven! God's grace...has set you free!!!

Let the echoes of these words reach into the very core of your being.

Let their resounding cadence seep into each and into every aspect of your life.

And may God's astounding forgiveness awaken us to the hope...and to the life...that such a grace makes possible. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Hymn ELW 656: Blest Be the Tie that Binds

Offering Prayer

Blessed are you maker of all things. You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the people are led by Joanne Bretzlaff

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Generous God, you make the last first, and the first last. Where this gospel challenges the church, equip it for its works of service. Strengthen those who serve. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sun and wind, bushes and worms, cattle and great cities—nothing in creation is outside your concern, mighty God. In your mercy, tend to it all. Give us a spirit of generosity toward all you have made. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Where we find envy and create enemies, you provide enough for all. Bring peace to places of conflict and violence, especially in the streets of our cities. Inspire leaders with creativity and wisdom. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Reveal yourself to all in need as you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, ready to relent from punishing. Accompany judges and lawyers, victims of crime and those serving sentences. Give fruitful labor and a livelihood to those seeking work. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Even beyond our expectations, you choose to give generously. Grant life, health, and courage to all who are in need *especially all those we pray for* Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We praise you for the generations that have declared your power to us. Give us faithfulness to follow them, living for Christ, until you call us to join them in the joyful song around his throne. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn ELW 537 LBW 197: On our way rejoicing**Benediction**

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.