

Sermon for Sunday 13th September 2026 (Trinity 14)

- Texts: Genesis 50.15-21, and *Matthew 18:21-35*

When Peter asks Jesus in our gospel reading this morning how often he should forgive someone I am sure that he too expected a very different reaction to the one he got.

You can almost hear him say it “As many as *Seven* times?” as if that number was making him uncomfortable enough.

Jesus answer that he should forgive seventy-seven times was obviously a shock to Peter.

Forgiveness is something that all of us have probably wrestled with from time to time. Our own ability to forgive is challenged by those things which have wounded and hurt us at an intimate level.

There is a need to forgive and be forgiven at so many different levels. There is a need to find forgiveness in a broken relationship. There is the need to find forgiveness when we feel let down or betrayed by a close friend. There is the need to find forgiveness when we feel we have been misjudged or mistreated in so many different circumstances. From what can seem to be minor disagreements to the most painful of conflicts our struggle with forgiveness is made all the more difficult by the teaching of Jesus.

Forgiveness is at the centre of Christian teaching. We hear Jesus speaking the words, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing,” as he is nailed to the cross. But if all we are feeling is pain to then be asked to forgive as Jesus tells us to can just make us feel guilty.

Just as it seemed to be for Peter, the complete forgiveness that Jesus talks about is a challenge to all of us at some point in our lives.

How then can we reflect on our gospel today in a way that transforms how we understand forgiveness? Perhaps a good place to start is to reflect on the words of the parable Jesus told. And as we do to perhaps look back to a time when we have felt forgiven ourselves.

In the parable we hear that a slave owed his master Ten thousand talents. It was a lot of money. The slave was effectively millions in debt because just one talent was the equivalent of 15 years wages for a labourer. With that much debt the slave was in a hopeless situation. In today’s terms he would have been made bankrupt. But Jesus says that the slave is released from his debt, he is forgiven. He has a second chance.

Yet the slave doesn’t seem to even acknowledge that his debt has been cancelled.

He simply goes out and finds the one who owes him money, just a single day's wage, and demands it.

It's as if he doesn't recognise the forgiveness that he has received himself or even acknowledge that the other slave is in the same situation that he was in.

Through this Gospel reading, Jesus is describing to us something of God's kingdom. A kingdom that turns upside down the values of our culture, and our background, and even the way we think about forgiveness. Jesus is reminding us that as God completely and utterly forgives us, we should forgive others.

He isn't saying that we should forgive and forget as if the pain wasn't there. But he is teaching that we should approach these situations with forgiveness and reconciliation as our goal.

Remembering and acknowledging that we ourselves are forgiven helps us to learn how to forgive others by letting go of our anger, resentment and pain, and by no longer judging them for their actions.

If I had been able to reflect on our readings a bit quicker this week and changed the first reading from the New Testament to the Old Testament, we would have heard the end of the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis.

And that story concludes with Joseph forgiving his brothers for what had done to him many years before.

Throughout his time in Egypt his life had been transformed by God. Joseph acknowledged that, and as he came to understand that something good had come out of the harm that his jealous brothers had tried to inflict on him, he was then able to offer them the same love and forgiveness that God had given him.

This morning's passages on forgiveness and on passing judgement are a challenge, just as they always have been. Whenever pain and upset still seem raw, the road to forgiveness might not be easy.

It might take a long time but ultimately, if we remind ourselves what it is to be forgiven it might just be about seeing things differently. To do that though might also mean turning the situation over to God. To ask him to walk with us, to admit to him that the feelings just won't go away.

And in prayer to ask and seek his strength and his love to change and transform our emotions.

As I have reflected on forgiveness, I have often been helped by the words of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, because it seems to me that he acknowledges how hard forgiveness can sometimes be.

To forgive is a process that does not exclude hate and anger. These emotions are all part of being human.”, “When I talk of forgiveness, I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred.”

To forgive then is to believe that we can remember the things that have wounded us and hurt us in a new way. It's a process and a journey with God in which we come out the other side no longer being angry because the past no longer has the power to hurt us.

And when our memories stop hurting us, no matter how long that takes, then we have truly forgiven from the heart and through the transforming love of God we are able to move on.

If we are open, willing and able to forgive others, we remain open to receive God's love and forgiveness in our own lives. Just as we ask for it each day in the Lord's Prayer.

Martin Luther King said, *“Forgiveness is not an occasional act it is a permanent attitude.”*

Remembering just how much God loves and forgives us, I wonder how different our world would be if each of us had forgiveness as a permanent attitude in our relationships, in our homes, our community, our church, and in our hearts.

AMEN