

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The message last week was clear: the fulfillment of the law is love. Furthermore, if one sins against you, we are to approach that person seeking reconciliation with them. And if they refuse, we bring in more and more of the community to attempt to show them that their sin has hurt not just one person, but hurts the full community, and through our love we seek reconciliation with that person for that sin. But, what about forgiveness?

Reconciliation is worth our time and our energy, but it only seeks to bring someone back into the community after their sin has removed them from that community. Forgiveness asks of us something more, something additional to this process, something that requires us to not only welcome this person back into the community, but through our expression of love, do so in a way that absolves them of that sin, that truly and deeply forgives them.

It is this question of forgiveness that Peter seeks clarification on today. Peter seeks a quantifiable answer, a specific guideline, a way of knowing he has tried enough. Sure, Peter says, you have to try and reconcile, to bring back into community, to treat them with love even if they refuse at every attempt, but what if this jerk keeps going at it, keeps sinning against me, against the community, do I forgive them even seven times?

“Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

Jesus may as well have said not seven but seven hundred seventy-seven, or seventy-seven thousand seven hundred seventy-seven. For the point that Christ is making to Peter, the point that Matthew is emphasising in his accounting, is that forgiveness is not something that is quantifiable. Forgiveness simply is. Forgiveness simply is, because it is of

God. And, because it is of God, forgiveness cannot be quantified, cannot be limited, cannot be checked off, it is always available.

The parable that Christ then tells echoes the human experience so clearly and succinctly. It shouldn't be that surprising that in this parable we are the slave that has their immense debt forgiven only to turn around and try to shake down a much more minor debt from a fellow slave. For we have all experienced God's forgiveness, and why wouldn't we share that, practice that in the world.

I think it's worth putting these two debts into their monetary historical context: a denarius was equal to one day's wages, in today's terms, that equates to \$88 for a minimum wage worker (before taxes), so 100 denarii would be roughly \$8,800, paid off through 100 days of work; a talent was a measurement of weight, in terms of money measured as a talent-weight of Gold or Silver, which makes it a little harder to parse out in modern times, but we know that it equated to roughly 75 pounds, which if we took the current value of Gold, equates to roughly \$1,405,558.11 for one talent, making 10,000 talents roughly \$14,055,581,100. This would take the slave 159,722,512.5 days of work to pay off his debt.

So, it's pretty clear that the debt we are forgiven by God far outweighs any debt that our neighbor could ever have against us. And yet, we still struggle to forgive even one denarius, let alone one talent. We still struggle to forgive them one time, let alone 77 times. And why should we?

Why should we forgive those who insist on sinning against us? Why should we treat them with respect, honor, treat them with love, when they refuse to do the same? Some things are simply beyond our grasp. The love that God shows for all of us is amazing and all

encompassing, but does that really require me to be the same, to live into this same level of forgiveness. Why does that responsibility fall upon us, to love, to forgive, every. single. time?

We should forgive, we must forgive, we have the responsibility to forgive, because offering forgiveness is offering love, and love is law. We should forgive, we must forgive, because we will all stand before the judgment seat of God and each and every one of us will be accountable to God for how we individually acted in this world, in this life. What someone else does to us, whatever debt they owe to us, whatever sin they commit against us, does not matter when we ourselves stand before God, it only matters when they stand before God. It is not our place to pass judgment. It is our place to offer love. It is our place to practice reconciliation. It is our place to radically practice forgiveness.

It is in our failure to offer grace, our failure to practice love for our neighbor, our failure to allow for forgiveness again and again and again and again, that we fall into the same place as the one who insists on sinning. It is in our commitment of offering and practicing grace, it is in our commitment of loving our neighbor as ourself, it is in our commitment to forgive a debt of even one denarius, let alone one hundred denarii or 10,000 talents, to practice forgiveness regardless of the running counter in our head as we hit seven times, seventy-seven times, and more, it is in these commitments that we find our connection to God. It is on these commitments that we will find ourselves judged favorably before God.

I want to note, however, that forgiveness is not the same as acceptance. As we heard last week, you can try and reconcile with someone and they still won't listen even after

you've involved the whole community. The same goes with forgiveness. You can forgive someone over and over and over again, but that does not mean that they will change, that they will cease their act of sin against you, that they will recognize the grace and power that is found in the offer of forgiveness and realize God is waiting there to welcome them in with open arms. Because of this, it is important to note that even as we are called to forgive, as we are called to love our neighbor as ourself, that does not mean we have to accept the sin that has been committed. Partly, this is because no sin can ever define a person, for we are all a beloved creation of God. Partly, this is because our love must know no bounds, for God's love knows no bounds.

This week a terrible event happened in our community, directly impacting people who share pews with you every week. The shooting at Freeman High School stands as a marker for us of the terrible, horrific reality that we live in today: that school shootings are a normal part of our life experience, that a child choosing to murder another child is a normal part of our common consciousness. There will be plenty of what-ifs, and I should've's, but hopefully people will be able to move on from those and begin the hard work of rebuilding a shattered community, rebuilding the shattered sense of security, the shattered psyches of students, faculty, and staff, who will jump at every loud bang in those school halls for a long time to come.

This community needs our love. This community is receiving our love as we band together as a greater Spokane community to lift up our neighbors. We pray for the soul of Sam Strahan. We pray for recovery for Emma, Gracie, and Jordyn. And, while we will never accept the shooting, the murder committed, it is clear that Caleb Sharpe needs our love,

more than anyone knew or realized. We will never accept what Caleb has done, but we must still love him, we must still forgive him for the brokenness, the darkness, that is in his soul, brokenness and darkness that led him to believe that this act would be an acceptable thing to do, regardless of the consequences. We pray for Caleb as much as we pray for all who have been impacted by the despicable act he committed, because that is our call as followers of Christ. We pray for Caleb, because we know that God's love and forgiveness knows no bounds if we turn to God seeking them, and if we forgive and love Caleb, perhaps the brokenness and darkness in his soul will one day be replaced with remorse, with repentance, and most importantly, with love.

Our forgiveness cannot be quantified, because forgiveness is of God. As we live into our call as followers of Christ, as we share our love with our neighbor, loving them as ourselves, we must also be ready and willing to forgive, to forgive even a debt that is unfathomable to comprehend. Forgiveness does not mean that we accept. But, it is in forgiving we show the love of God to another. It is in forgiving that we ourselves have seen the love of God, and that is something we cannot help but offer to another. Go and forgive.

Amen.