

XXII TRINITY 2014
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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PHILIPPIANS 1.3 ST. MATTHEW 18.21

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Forgiveness...was more than just a word for C.S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity*. "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea", he wrote, "until they have something to forgive."

Mere Christianity was first published in 1952 and based on several BBC radio talks Lewis gave between 1942-1944 while he was at Oxford during WWII. For Lewis, forgiveness is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian.

In the Gospel, our friend Peter asks Jesus if there is a limit on how many times he should forgive someone who has hurt him. Peter may have thought he was being generous when he suggested to Jesus seven was more than enough times to forgive someone. But Jesus tells Peter there is no limit on how many times we should be ready to forgive someone.

Jesus goes on to tell a story about an ungrateful worker. The king in the story has decided to check on his workers' accounts. One man owes the king 10,000 talents and is told to pay up...or else. Just how much money is 10,000 talents? A lot! By one estimate...about \$36-million!

There were two options available to the man...pay the debt in full...or have his property confiscated and then be sold into slavery along with his wife and children. The man's bad money management was about to have life-changing consequences...and not for the better...for himself and his family.

But the king does something unexpected. He is moved to compassion when the man asks for more time to repay him. Instead, the king pulls out his ledger and writes-off the debt. The king has given the man a fresh start...a new beginning...free of the debt both he and the king knew he could never have repaid.

On his way home the man meets a co-worker who owes him 100 pence...a few hundred dollars. Instead of showing the same kind of compassion and mercy toward his co-worker the king had just shown him, he has him thrown in jail. When the king finds out what has happened, he gives the ungrateful worker what amounts to a life sentence without parole.

The Story of the Ungrateful Servant teaches us that God's forgiveness of our sins is of enormous magnitude...through his death on the cross Jesus forgave a debt we could not possibly have repaid. C.S. Lewis also wrote, "To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable...because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us."

God's enormous degree of forgiveness should be the model for the way we forgive others. It should be a basic part of our nature as God's people. Jesus taught us in that most perfect prayer...the Lord's Prayer...forgive others just as God forgives us. What God wants us to do is adopt his standard of forgiveness as our own.

What about those who refuse to acknowledge they have done us wrong or ask for our forgiveness? Most of us have been hurt deeply by someone...a friend or relative...perhaps even someone within the Church. Adamantly refusing to forgive them offends God. We need to be prepared to forgive them. And our forgiveness of others must be genuine.

We may not hold a grudge against those who don't think they need God's forgiveness or ours. We must pray that God will give them his grace and open their hearts to forgiveness, but we can't force our forgiveness on them...to do so would make our forgiveness disingenuous and cheap.

In the story about the ungrateful worker it might appear the king took back his forgiveness from the ungrateful worker. The king did not take back his forgiveness...the ungrateful worker rejected it. The king expected the worker to show the same kind of mercy toward his fellow worker the king had shown him. While God does not take back his love and compassion we can reject them and that will leave us in a spiritual prison...escape comes when we say we are sorry.

When it comes to forgiveness we must start with taking a good hard look at the person in the mirror. Have we hurt someone and refused to acknowledge it? Do we blame others for our own faults and shortcomings? Perhaps we need to make some changes.

God has forgiven us...we should be grateful for that and not hold back when the opportunity to forgive others comes our way.

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