

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 18:21–35 Peter came up and said to [Jesus], “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

In the Name of Jesus.

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

...says the One Who MADE our hearts! And Who sent out His Eleven to baptize and teach us God the Father all over again; to make us little, and GREAT, and give us new hearts— hearts NOT beating with the thu-thump of the Law, now accusing, now defending ourselves—no, hearts that come from and beat from and LIVE as they forgive, as He forgives, FROM...THE..HEART!

Risen from His Suffering on Calvary, His heart beats now—little ones of Jesus!—beats ONLY to intercede for you, to MAKE God your Heavenly Father anew each morning! And as long as HIS heart still beats, we can even bear to hear this lesson today.

The scerriest, the most heart-breaking part is NOT the threat, the STRANGE and ALIEN work of our Savior, as He puts on His best Moses Halloween costume and tries to hide what He IS behind something He is most definitely NOT: ‘So will my heavenly Father treat each of you, if you do not forgive your brother from the heart!’

No, the heartburn comes—AGAIN!—from OUR question, the question of the disciples. (Pray for and pardon your poor pastor today, again, as I pollute your ears with such words. But they are in the book of Jesus for a reason, so here goes!)

Just like 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,' our hearts are attacked today with THIS bit of calculation: "...how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Oh, holy Saint Peter even PREFACES this dear prayer with the word, 'Lord!' Proving AGAIN the words of Jesus, 'Not everyone who cries out to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven!'

This is who we are, dearly beloved! Instead of little as God made us, we're puffed up beyond all recognition to heaven! SO certain that WE are oriented, aligned with the ground of all being—we're not so much making up false GODS, my friends, as much as we are making up FALSE US!, when we do what we're born wired to do!

And SO certain, and at a hair's trigger, ready at the drop of a hat, to find out and broadcast that VIOLENCE UNBEARABLE has been done to OUR majesty by those who do NOT appreciate US in our MAJESTY as we DESERVE! So, to whom do kings and emperors and gods complain? To OTHER kings and emperors and gods—tyrants ALL! And once again, Satan so EASILY, READILY, NATURALLY climbs BACK in the saddle on Peter, on us, and has Jesus' BFF ask a question—ANOTHER question!—that, I pledge to you, will have no place, will receive no oxygen to air on the Day Christ comes to bring us His Kingdom:

'YOU, Lord, God's Rep., know VERY WELL how trying the next man can be! And I am ON BOARD with your talk of forgiveness and pardon, because God knows, YOU know, that I fall short now and then. But let's not lose our minds, dear Jesus! There are those who are TRYING to align with heaven, the kingdom, God above and YOU; and then there are OBVIOUSLY a whole group of people who AIN'T...EVEN...TRYING! Now, how long do you-n-me, me-n-god, tyrant-up-and-hidden and tyrant-ready-and-willing—how long, how many times do we suffer violence from the next man, and have it proven to us that such a man, though my brother, is not worth the bother anymore?!'

When Saint Paul makes a list of the sins we men do, Romans chapter one, he begins with making up silly false gods, shaped like toy animals and such—fitting. He then moves on to how we PRETEND to love others, even BOAST of loving the next man, when all that we truly mean is that we use the next man up until our appetites are satisfied.

But our apostle ends the list of things that bring the wrath of God to earth with this list: 'foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.' Foolish, as in there is no God. Faithless, as if the Gospel is nothing. Heartless, as if we do not even have one. Ruthless, lacking RUTH: the recognition that no matter how off-base the next man is, he's a man pretty much like me!

You must see this, my dear ones! The Lord is putting on His scary Moses Halloween costume and doing His STRANGE and ALIEN work again, of preaching the LAW! It is just, my friends, that He's not very good at it! No surprise there.

Lesson number One, dear Jesus! If you're going to THREATEN people, do NOT bring up 'My Heavenly Father!' The FIRST WORDS you have taught us to pray in the prayer you have given us!

Forgiveness from the heart, dear Christians, is NOT the 'easy brush off,' as if a feather has landed on us, a leaf or a love-bug! The HEART is where Christ did His work, does His work. The place of heartache and heartburn and a broken heart and we've got more in our language! And it is the language of Calvary, the broken heart that cried out to His Heavenly Father, 'You are NO ONE'S God if not MINE! And out of ALL MEN, WHY would you forsake someone like ME, for the sake of anyone else?!

Praise the Lord, Hallelujah! Heaven did NOT ADD or SUBTRACT ANYTHING from the word spoken over Him that day, when He jumped into the water with all those who were confessing their sins. 'My beloved Son, fully pleasing to Heaven, to Me!'

And since He added nothing, took nothing away from THAT word of promise, even you and I are raised up to a life that is not oriented, tied or chained to ANY threat! Not coming at us, or from us!

Instead, the cross of Jesus—which He calls on us each to take up every day!—tells us the broken heart the Son of Mary received to 'save His people from their sins.'

Yes, the man pardoned that huge amount SHOULD HAVE remembered the great debt HE was pardoned, when he was violated by a man who owed him! And, yes, if the final word we have from HEAVEN is that GOD is going to 'get back' at all those people who have violated us, and who have not been as appreciative as they should be, then, yes, this is a scary lesson indeed! Prison and guards and torment until the last penny is paid.

And the next man will take it, my friends, if you give him a break, pass over his sins, out of fear of going to a far worse prison yourself. But that is the same old, same old, trying to save our own souls. And it is NOT the faith of the disciples of Jesus.

People DO violence to you. There is INDEED a majesty about you, created in God's

image, that should NOT be attacked and disparaged daily as much. But it happens! And it can hurt our hearts and burn them and break them, when the day was going along so well, and then men show their true colors and we hurt..

Your Savior, your Brother, your King and your Teacher: He is cheering you on!