

The Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity
23 October, Anno Domini 2022
St. Matthew 18:21-35

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear forgiven sinners,

We love our rights and the King in today's parable certainly had every right to demand payment of whatever he had loaned. After all, the servant had borrowed the money, agreeing to pay it back. No one is going to argue that the King didn't have the right to demand everything back or that there shouldn't be consequences if the demand isn't met, if the agreement isn't kept. This is where justice is truly terrifying. It's great when you are the beneficiary. It's the last thing you want when you're the one in debt. The servant owed 10,000 talents. That's 10,000 years' wages, the definition of impossible. Can you imagine the servant's terror at the thought of knowing that his master wanted all of his money back, right then? The sentence was fierce. His debt meant slavery. He and his family along with everything that he had was going to be taken away. That was justice. And in any court of law, the servant would've had no rights, no recourse. He owed the money and the man wanted it back. All he could do was fall down and make some ridiculous plea for time as though there could have ever been enough time to repay such an astronomical amount.

What happened next makes absolutely no sense. At great personal cost the King gave up his rights. He looked in compassion at this poor servant. He forgave the whole debt as well as the punishment. He could have dismissed one or the other and still been considered gracious. Instead, all of it, debt and punishment, was wiped out, gone forever. No deals. No, "Well, just pay whatever you can." No wage garnishments or reductions in rates. Just forgiven. The servant got to walk away without paying a single penny. Can you imagine being the servant? One minute he's going through a hell of despair with no hope and the next it's all just gone, over. He owed nothing. Well, that's just ridiculous. Can you imagine your mortgage company just dismissing your debt saying "the building and property are yours. Have a nice day." The world doesn't work this way.

But this isn't a parable about the kingdom of the world. It is a parable about the kingdom of God and in the kingdom of God we do not owe money or work. We owe our entire being - body and soul. We have been wretched servants, borrowing time and again against our eternal life. Living as though God didn't matter and as though we mattered the most. Our Lord's name we have not honored as we should. Our worship and prayers have faltered. We have not let his love have its way with us, and so our love for others has failed. There are certainly those whom we have hurt and those whom we have failed to help. We daily sin much. What if the Lord called in your debt today - right now? We

deserve to have our account settled with us and because we can't possibly pay it, we should be thrown in the jailhouse of hell for our sin. We have used our freedom as a cloak for unrighteousness. We have ignored the Word of the Lord, and despised the gifts that he has so richly lavished upon us, regularly spending our time, energy, and resources on things that don't matter and then giving the Lord whatever, if any, is left, if we feel like it. We have been unwilling to forgive the petty sins of others, harboring anger and resentment, clinging tenaciously to our rights and our things. We have nothing with which to pay God. While our works may shine like the sun here on earth, before God, they are nothing but a worthless pile of filthy disgusting rags.

But the kingdom of God is nothing like the kingdom of men. In the kingdom of God, God gives up his rights and pardons us fully, freely, without limit. We neither owe him a single drop of blood, nor will we have to receive the punishment that we deserve. There is no three-strikes-and-your-out rule. The debt of your sin is real. But the blood of Jesus has been smeared over the balance which now reads zero, nothing. In fact, He has also filled your account with the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ. Your heavenly Father forgives you, because he has compassion on you, because he loves you, because he is willing to pay what you owe with the greatest treasure in his kingdom - His only-begotten son, Jesus Christ.

But the parable doesn't end there, because once the sinner is absolved by God he walks out into the world among his neighbors, among his fellow debtors, among those who hurt him and sin against him. This parable isn't about unbelievers. It is about those of us who have fallen before our Lord under the great weight of our sin, who have been reduced to nothing by the crushing weight of our debt and who have felt the immeasurable peace of the King's forgiveness, who have been raised from certain judgment to the inexpressible joy of eternal life. Every week, Lord-willing, every day, you pray the Lord's Prayer and you implore Him to forgive you your trespasses as you forgive those who trespass against you. Forgiveness is difficult. We hate justice when we are the ones with the debt to pay, but we love justice when we are owed. But Jesus issues a stern warning to Peter's question that we've all wrestled with "How many times, O Lord, does my brother get to sin against me and I have to forgive him? Is seven times enough? I mean, come on. More than that and I'm going to find it really hard to believe that he's actually sorry! You can't expect me to just let it all go! What if he does it again?!"

Repent. Have you forgotten just how much your Lord has forgiven you? Will you mock and despise what has been done for you by demanding of others what God didn't hold against you? Have you forgotten that God gave up all His rights against you and instead uses everything in His kingdom to help you, to protect you, to serve you, to save you just as He demands of you in the Seventh Commandment? To assert your rights over your brother or your enemy, is to claim that God has treated you that way. It's a denial of God's forgiveness and an invitation for God to withdraw His mercy and deal the same way with you. There is no room for grudges in the kingdom of God. We are called to lay

aside our rights against those who slander us, who steal from us, who abuse us, who lie about us, who hurt us, who time and again take advantage of us. It is one thing to struggle to forgive, to wrestle against the flesh's desire to hold on to your anger and cry out to God that He would teach you to forgive. It is wholly another thing to refuse forgiveness. God will not hold such a person guiltless. The payment you demand will be demanded of you.

You have no reason and nothing to gain by denying anyone forgiveness, even if they never ask for it. You have been forgiven everything. Your debt was paid long before you ever even accumulated it, let alone sought forgiveness. God already called in your debt and Jesus paid every last penny. Death has been emptied of fear because there is no sin that stands against you to accuse you, nothing that God will hold against you because your Savior has written the check and signed it with His Blood. And so that you might know that your account is among those paid, He gives you the very Body and Blood that have stamped your account – PAID IN FULL. The world will call you a fool, wasteful, a simpleton – but forgive everything always because that is exactly how the Lord Jesus has forgiven you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.