

Sevens

Shepherd's Grace Church

September 14, 2014

Then Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, if a member of the church sins against me how many times must I forgive that person. As many as seven times?" Jesus replied, "Not seven times but seven times seven times or seventy seven times or seventy times seven times!"

For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. When the reckoning began, a man was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. The man could not pay so the king ordered that the slave be sold along with his wife and children and all his possessions and that payment be made. The man fell to his knees and pleaded with his lord saying, "Please be patient with me and I will repay every penny." Moved with compassion for the man, his lord forgave the man's debt and released him. While on his way out, this same slave came across a man who owed him one hundred denarius. He seized the man by his throat and demanded payment in full. The other slave fell to his knees and pleaded with the man. "Please have patience with me and I will repay every penny," he said. The first slave refused and had him thrown into prison until he agreed to pay the entire debt.

Other slaves witnessed what had taken place and were quite distressed about what they had seen so they went to the king and told him everything they had seen. The king then summoned the slave and said to him, "You worthless slave! I forgave you everything you owed because you pleaded with me. Should you not have shown mercy to this man as I showed mercy to you?" Then, out of anger, the king threw the slave into prison until he agreed to repay the entire debt.

So also will My Heavenly Father do to you unless you forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart!
(Matt. 18: 21-35) (Read also Romans 14: 1-12)

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Rom. 14: 10) These few words from the passage from Romans this morning get to the heart of the matter that Jesus is talking about today. Recall, last week Jesus interceded in an argument between disciples wanting to know which of them was the greatest. He put a little child in their midst and suggested, not that they grow up, but that they grow down, that they humble themselves and seek God with the wide eyes of a little child. Greatness, he said does not come from lording power over others just because you can. Greatness comes from recognizing the power you have and using that power to give to others! Why do we judge? How can we possibly judge? All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God! (Rom. 3) All of us will stand before God and face God's judgment regarding our actions.

Given this knowledge, what do you suppose was the motivation for Peter's question to Jesus this morning. Last week we noticed that the conversation Jesus is having with His disciples stems from their argument as to which one of them is to be the greatest. Does Peter feel slighted by Jesus' response?

Has he somehow supposed that Jesus would say to the others, "Peter is the greatest?" After all, in chapter 16, Jesus told Simon, "What you have said has not been made known to you by mere flesh but My Father in heaven has made this known to you. You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church!" Does Peter feel Jesus' commendation gives him license to lay claim to the title "greatest"? Has Peter already forgotten that immediately following his prophetic declaration in Caesarea, Jesus rebuked him for his own failure to distinguish between heavenly and earthly things? Is it one of the disciples whom Peter believes has sinned against him? Is it God Himself?

Scripture doesn't tell us, but we can speculate. Jesus is dealing with conflict in the church here. There is trouble brewing and it needs to be taken care of! The lesson Jesus wants us to learn is that there will be trouble in the church! There will be trial in the church. There will be difference of opinion among the disciples, the students who seek to serve the Lord so completely, and that difference must be dealt with. Last week we learned that one way to deal with the difficulties between one member of the church and another is to confront the disagreement head on, to go to the person and seek to gain understanding. Three times in verses 15-20 of chapter 18, Jesus tells the disciples to listen. Listening promotes understanding. Rushing to judgment promotes rejection and an irreconcilable sense of loss! Jesus wants the disciples, Jesus wants us to know that the rejection we lose on earth will be the same rejection we will face in heaven. All will stand before God and be judged!

Perhaps Peter's question was one of frustration with his fellow disciples. How long Lord must I suffer these insufferable students of yours? They keep questioning my authority as leader! They continue to debate among themselves as to which is greatest. Why do we need to continue after them when all they do is pull down the fabric of the church! Of what possible use can they be to us? How many times do I continue to correct before I finally give up and go on to others who will be more receptive to the reality that you are messiah?

Does the church ask this question in today's world? Do we sometimes see those who struggle with their faith, with relationships, with life and wish we were given others to be part of our church? How much easier would it be if we could have all the well people come to church, you know the ones who make more money, have more time to work, are more willing to follow the "right" way of ministry instead of all these people who have their own issues to deal with? Why Lord, why must the church suffer these insufferable so much? How often must we continue to reach out to those who just do not seem to get it? Do we have to forgive them 7 times?

Have you ever noticed how negation with God seems to start at the "low end" of our expectations? For Peter, 7 times was a lot! He could not imagine having to continue to teach and reteach and reteach the same thing to the same person as many as 7 times. He thought Jesus would laugh at such a large number and let him know that God did not expect us to continue to reach out to others if they did not make an effort to reach out to him! Imagine Peter's surprise when Jesus said, "go higher!" 17 times? 27 times? "Higher still Jesus said! 37, 47 times? Try 7x7 or 77 or 777 times. Peter was appalled! It could take a dozen lifetimes to let people learn of God's glory if I have to listen to their misunderstandings the same way time after time!

I can imagine Jesus smiling at the revelation. "Now you're beginning to understand He might have said!" Now you're beginning to recognize that we have an eternity to reconcile with each other. God sent Me so you, so the church, so the world could know the depth and determination of God's love! When you stand before me, I will judge not based on your excellence in learning the lessons of love but on your willingness to teach those lessons to others.

For us in the 21st century, those lessons are presented in some intriguing ways. Our daily headlines speak to issues of immigration. People want to come across the borders of the United States because we have perpetuated a myth that we have more, we have bigger, we have better and that every person who lives here can have some of that. When people want to come, we say, "Wait a minute! Not so fast! There are hoops to jump through, paper work to fill out." People come and they come and they come because we have told them this is a desirable place! How many times must we keep shutting them out? As many as seven times.

Our daily headlines speak to issues of sexuality. The church has gotten caught up in the conversation but it has gotten caught up in the wrong way. The church has gotten caught up in issues of judgment. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Rom. 14: 10) The church has allowed groups and factions to pull the church into the debate about what is right and what is wrong. The church has forgotten what Jesus is trying to teach this morning. All have sinned! All have fallen short of the Glory of God! When the church tries to pass judgment on one sin, the church binds all sin! Sin bound on earth will also be bound in heaven! Sin bound in heaven will be judged in heaven and it will be judged against the church. How we react to one sin will determine how God will react to our sin! The church, the people of the church will be judged based on how willing we are to forgive and not how willing we are to pontificate and put ourselves above the sins of others. The church is not morally superior! The church is the people! All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God! How often should we encourage all to come, all to listen, all to hear? As many as seven times?

Our daily headlines speak to other religions organizing against our nation. Muslims it is thought are charged with the responsibility for killing as many infidels as they can. Never mind doing the research into the truth about this claim in their holy scripture. Never mind discovering that there is no truth to this teaching in scripture. Never mind discovering that this teaching comes from a few as an invitation to many who want a better life, who want a different life, who are jealous of a perception of life that perpetrates freedom and indiscretion and immorality! Never mind that the ones who perpetrate this message do not understand the fullness of their own teachings! We believe that these Muslims represent the whole of their religion and that they have an evil agenda.

Never mind that this was the same agenda practiced by Christians against Jews back in the 1930's, and 40's and 50's and today! Never mind this was the same evil perpetrated against blacks in that same time period! Never mind that the Ku Klux Klan wanted Christians to believe that we were morally superior because we were white, and anglo-saxon and protestant! Because we were WASP, we were somehow more worthy of God's grace than other people! Never mind that it was only a few who

perpetuated the myth. Never mind that we did exactly to others what we are persecuting others for doing to us today!

Are they wrong? WAS THE KLAN WRONG? ARE THE FACTIONS OF THE MUSLIM FAITH WRONG? Of course they are wrong. Any message that provides meaning for God's plan other than love and life is wrong but we cannot teach that from outside the church. The world cannot hear that but the church can hear that! The world does not know the boundless love of God but the church does! Peter still does not see the fullness of forgiveness but he will! He will when he denies the Lord for himself. He will when he runs away. He will when he recognizes that he is part of the church. He is not the whole church. He is the rock, the profession of faith but he is also a faith that will be tested. How often should he forgive? How often should he be forgiven? That which is bound on earth will be bound in heaven! Now we wonder how Peter feels about his question. As many as seven times?

In the world of Peter, the church had a responsibility to teach disciples by inviting them to follow Jesus. That meant more than just hearing the words he spoke. It meant watching the example He set! When Jesus took the cup at the last supper, when He said, take this, all of you and drink from it, this is the cup of my blood, the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. It will be shed for you and for all, He was conveying the number He had in mind when he told Peter not "As many as seven times." His example was the forgiveness of all people for all sins. He took upon Himself the sins of the world so that we might be forgiven, so our sin might be loosed on earth and therefore loosed in heaven! The rock, the church, the people of the world...all the people of the world would do well to learn from the example.

(If you were in church on Sunday, you know that it was at this point in the message that I invited Donnie Huffman to come forward to share some music. Donnie played three songs. The one I requested was "Guardian Angel of the King." Following the musical interlude, the guardian angel was made known to the congregation. He came out speaking in a Piedmont Region southern drawl and this is what he had to say!)

Good Mornin'! Ya'll may not recognize me but I am the guardian angel of the king! I was sent to eath (The letter "r" is almost not existent in the vocabulary of the Piedmont) to pratec da Messiah. I came and I made myself known to Joseph, his step daddy even before He was bon. Joseph, he 'as to skeirt to take Mary as 'is wife. He knowed dat if 'e done so, everone 'd talk 'bout 'm an criticize 'm an all like dat! I talked t' im and I sait, "Ain't no need to be skiert! This'un's gonna be Jesus. He's gonna be God's own son. I'm here to pertekt 'm cause he's gonna save 'is people from they sin!" I'll pertekt you too!

Now, Joseph, he listened and he done as he's told. He forgave Mary (though she didn't do nothin' wrong.) He put up with all the stuff from stupid people who didn't know no better an' he raised up Jesus as 's own son! If'n he didn't listen, he never could've known what God 'us tryin' ta do! He'd a jus missed out on all dat glory!

Now ya'al need ta listen to me! Ya needs ta know dat God still wants ta share dat glory. I been lef behind ta walk the earth and guard da church. It's mi responsibility ta make sure da church ain't hurt by da wold! Da church ken take kere of'n hersef but da church needs ta know it don't need ta die for da sins of da world. Da church needs ta know dat Jesus, he already done dat! He done paid da price for sin

and da church needs ta know dat those people who are still sinnin'...he done paid da price for dem too! Sometimes 'seems like da church, she wanna forget dat! Seems like da church wanna pretend she got only saints. That 'us what 'ole Peter 'us so bent out a shape 'bout! Peter only wanted ta work w' dem people who got it right! Peter, he 'us da one who wanted ta determine what 'us right! Jesus, he 'us da one who knew dat da only thing right 'us takin on da sin of da world! He knowed...He forgave...He died...He rose from da grave! It 'us all on him and da rest 'a you folks...ya'al tryin' ta mess dat up! What with yer high falutin ways and yer thinkin' yer all better 'n everone else! Dat 'us Peter's problem and dat 'us what kep gittin' him in trouble! Fergivin'...that's what Jesus 'us all about. Dat's why he told da story bout dat king fella!

See, da king, he kinda wanned ta git paid from all dem people who owed him. Only problem, king land loaned more dhan dey cud ever pay! Dat one fella...owed 10,000 talents. Dat 'take him bout 130 years ta pay back. Dat man begged...oh how dat man begged! King, he kinda had a soft heart and more money and wealth den he ever knowed 'at he's gonna do with! King forgave da man all da debt.

Ya know, dat's kinda wot God do! He don't keep no grudge. He forgive! He forgive it all! Why...same reason as da king. He really do love da people. He only want da best for dem! He want dem to learn how to love from him. Dat 'us why he send His only son! See, the son, he come ta take on all da sin so we don't owe it no more! God don't hold da sin bound on earth...it's not gonna be bound in heaven neither! It's all been done and paid! Paid once for all by Jesus!

But da church...da people dat make da church, dey wanna hold da other people guilty. God wanna try to git dier attention! So Jesus tells 'bout da man who been forgivin'. Dat man, he been forgiven, he gits ta go and live forever but dat same man, he don't know 'bout forgivin'! He go right out and he se someone else 'sinned against him. He grab dat man right dere and he make dat man pay and he t'row dat man in da jail till all da debt 'paid! When da church gonnal learn...what ya'all bind here, it be bound dere! If ya'all judge here, ya'all gonna be judged there! If'in ya'all fergive here, it be fergiven there!

When dem new disciples saw how dis Jesus took on da sin of da world, how he be 'bout forgivin' everone, they started ta fergive everone. Dey started w' demselves...specially Peter. He denied, he runned away, but he knew God's fergivness! He fergave hissself. But ya'all done messed this stuff up. Ya'all started thinkin' "Hey, since I'm saved, don't make no difference 'bout dem other folks!" Dat's not wat Jesus 'us teachin'! He 'us teachin bout Grace! He 'us teachin' bout how God 'us wantin' ta fergive all a us!

I am da guardian angel of the king! One a dese days, he gonna come back. I'm jus waitin' fer my instructions 'bout when and where! One thing I do know fer sure! When he come, he gonna separate dem who helped others, dem who welcomed others, dem who fergived from all dem who didn't. Dem who helped, he gonna welcome dem. Dem who didn', he gonna let dem spend eternity without him. Don't ya think it might be worth more dan 7 times fergivin' someun so God can fergive ya'all when 'e shows up? Sompin' ta think 'bout! Amen!