

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA  
The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: September 17, 2023

Wages and Forgiveness

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. I almost have no need to preach today, as the combination of our Epistle from Romans and our Gospel reading are in simple English. Unlike the other parables Jesus often shares, this one makes complete sense and is simple to understand. With that being said, I thought I would take this morning to explore just how important this scripture is, and how important forgiveness is to being a follower of Jesus.

I begin with our Epistle, the last paragraphs of which can be found in our Prayer Book as part of the procession into the church during a funeral. “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord, so then whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord’s.”

This is the reminder that everything, yes, everything you have, including your life and your death belong to God. For as much as we feel we have control over our lives, as much as we can feel comfortable when our bank account reaches that magic number that we feel gives us security, to the minutia of knowing exactly where all our family members are at one time due to GPS, the truth is we are really not in control. I can attest as a hospice chaplain that the idea that we are not in control of our lives or our

deaths is often quite a shock to the people I meet who come on hospice services.

With that in mind, we pray every Sunday, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” and if we look at a similar version, trespass is often translated “debt” and forgiving “debtors”. This is exactly what Jesus is reminding his disciples.

We are an Easter people. We know the end of the story. We know that he who dies with the most toys, still dies, and can also not take those treasures with him. Trust me, those items are of less importance to God than you are. That is why God sent Jesus to save you, not your home, your truck, or your things. He sent Jesus to model what is really important to God, and it's you. You with all your messiness, you with all your issues, you with all your imperfections, it is you that is important to God.

That being said, God, through Jesus has forgiven us. God is the initial king in our Gospel, the original forgiver hoping that we as his children will extend that forgiveness to those we know who need it. Let's dive a little deeper into the details of this story to allow it to speak to you more clearly.

The original slave owed ten thousand talents. A talent was a measure of weight, with one talent equaling 130 pounds of gold, silver or precious metals. In order to work off his debt, this slave owed about 15 years of service to his king for one talent. This slave owed 10 times that amount! Basically, his debt would outlive his life. In spiritual terms, our sins, and

their debts would outlive our lives. This slave owed the king his life and beyond.

A talent is equal to around 5 thousand denari. A denari is a small silver coin equal to a worker's daily wage. The second slave owed 100 denari. This is still a debt but considerably smaller than the debt forgiven by the king. So when doing a comparison, the amounts forgiven were indeed very different, but not different in spiritual growth.

For Jesus and for us, forgiveness is relational. It is not the amount forgiven, it is the act of forgiveness that is important to God. As an Easter people who read the Passion every year and hear the words, "forgive them for they know not what they do." This should be our motto.

Which begs the question about what forgiveness really is. Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.

Just as important as defining what forgiveness *is*, though, is understanding what forgiveness is *not*. Experts who study or teach forgiveness make clear that when you forgive, you do not gloss over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses. Though forgiveness can help repair a damaged relationship, it doesn't obligate you to reconcile with the person who harmed you, or release them from any legal accountability.

Instead, forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger. While there is some debate over whether true forgiveness requires positive feelings toward the offender, experts agree that it at least involves letting go of deeply held negative feelings. In that way, it empowers you to recognize the pain you suffered without letting that pain define you, enabling you to heal and move on with your life.

So what do you think that means to God? Have you ever asked that question? Why would God forgive us? I believe God knows us and feels our pain, as we are part of his creation. I believe therefore that God recognizes our sin, which causes pain, but God would rather have us heal and move on. God doesn't want to be stuck in our mistakes, and God doesn't want us to be stuck in them either. He doesn't want us to blame each other as none of us are perfect.

Today's scripture asks us to take a moment and realize our lives belong to God, and God through his Son's sacrifice has freed us and forgiven us. Basically, he gave us back our lives; so what is stopping you?

I leave you with the meme a friend sent me through email this morning. I believe this is the world we can have with forgiveness in place. It reads, "Peace is not when everyone agrees. It is when we can respect our disagreements and still play in the same sandbox together."

Forgiving allows us to do that. After all, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Amen