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### WHY FORGIVE?

Often in church we hear that we are supposed to forgive others.

- But I thought it might be helpful to spend some time today thinking about why we're supposed to forgive.

As I mentioned last week, as we look at this passage from the gospel of Matthew, it is also important to think about the author and the situation to which he was writing.

- The Apostle Matthew was a tax collector before answering JESUS' call to become one of HIS disciples.
- In JESUS' day, tax collectors worked to raise money for the Romans who were occupying the land of Israel by collecting funds from the Jews and reporting those who would not or could not pay.
  - Many of these government agents would collect two or three times what the Romans expected and then keep the rest for themselves.
    - Therefore, tax collectors were considered traitors by their own people, and were not treated well by either side.
    - And because they dealt with unclean foreigners, they themselves were seen as unclean and people to be shunned.
- Again, Matthew was one of these hated tax collectors.
  - No one would associate with him.
  - Certainly, no one wanted to be his friend.
    - But then JESUS showed up, and treated him like a human being, like a person of worth, and his life was changed.
      - For the first time in a long time, Matthew was accepted for who he was, and forgiven for who he had been.

Matthew wanted to see other lives changed, too.

- So, he wrote a book that, among other things, sought to help people learn how to treat each other, because of the way GOD treated them.
  - And, as we hear today, he wanted people to know how to treat even those who have sinned against us.

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To understand the significance of this conversation between JESUS and Peter, we need a little lesson about the significance of certain numbers in biblical times.

- In those days, the laws of the law of the temple said that you must forgive a person three times.
  - The number three was understood as the number of GOD.
    - Thus, while it was human to err, it was divine to forgive three times.
- The number four was the number for the world:
  - four seasons, four points of the compass, four winds, etc.
    - And when the world (four) cooperated with GOD (three) you had perfection (seven).
      - The world was created by GOD in seven days.
      - The first three commandments are about our relationship with GOD;
        - while the last seven deal with GOD (3) wants us to treat each other (4).

So, when Peter came to JESUS and suggested that he should exceed the law and go with the perfect number of seven with regard to forgiveness, he probably expected to be warmly commended by the LORD.

- JESUS, though, answered that HIS followers must forgive:
  - not just three times,
  - not just seven times;
  - not just seven plus seven times;
  - not just seven times seven times;
    - but seven times seven times ten.
- (It doesn't matter whether your translation says "seventy-seven times" as ours does today, or "seven times seventy" as others do,
  - because JESUS' point is that we are to forgive every time.)

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Then, JESUS tells a parable, and remember that a parable is a story with elements that are common to us, but that contain a truth that GOD wants us to learn.

- Today, JESUS might have told this story about a banker rather than a king, but even in the form we have it, the story still has great meaning for us.

The contrast in the story is between a huge debt forgiven and a small debt not forgiven.

- While scholars differ on the exact value of a talent, translated here as a bag of gold, some estimate that it would take a person 27 years to work off the amount owed to the king.
- The smaller debt was worth about three month's work.
  - What JESUS is saying here is that when we compare the grudges and hard feelings we hold against others with what GOD has forgiven us,
    - we will easily find that we are the ones who have been forgiven much, but too often cannot find it in our hearts to forgive little.

We've all heard the expression, "Forgive and forget."

- Though we may have heard it a lot, I doubt many of us have really had much success at doing that very thing.
  - Perhaps we can forgive, but is it possible to forget the painful things that others have done to us?
    - We can't change the past, can we?
      - Still, if we want to move beyond those painful memories, we have to strive for a new beginning.

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A dentist moved into a new house.

- He soon found the neighborhood teenagers littering his yard and riding their bicycles across his yard.

One night, the leader of the teenage gang had a bad toothache.

- His mother sent him to the dentist to be examined.
  - The dentist discovered that the tooth needed extensive repair, but the boy refused.
    - He said his family could not afford it.
  - The dentist persuaded the boy to let him do the work anyway.

The dentist didn't send the boy a bill.

- Soon the dentist completely forgot about the incident.
- That summer the dentist left town for an extended vacation.
  - When he returned, he found that his lawn had been well cared for by the teenager whose tooth he had repaired.
    - When the dentist thanked the boy, he just smiled and replied, "A tooth for a tooth."

- (My brother likes to say, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth has nothing to do with transplants.”)

The dentist could have held a grudge.

- Instead, he forgave those teenagers and created a new beginning with one of them.
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JESUS came into our world to teach us and to set an example.

- If Peter didn't understand the meaning of this story that JESUS told him, it was not long before he did.
    - Soon JESUS would go to Jerusalem, where Peter would deny HIM.
    - And not long after that, after JESUS had risen from the dead, the disciples and their leader shared a breakfast on the beach.
    - Yet it was not until JESUS said to him, “Peter, feed MY sheep,” that Peter knew JESUS had forgiven him.
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As I said earlier, a huge debt versus a small debt.

- We don't often think about the size of the debt that has been forgiven us.

But take a moment now.

- Think of any lie you've ever told;
- And anytime you've said something that hurt another person;
- And any occasion where you've turned you back on someone who needed your help;
- And any person you've looked at and thought of as anything other than one of GOD'S children;
- And any time that you've made something else more important than GOD'S will for you.

My purpose is not to shame you.

- There is not one of us who can't find ourselves in those things I just mentioned.
  - Everyone of should be able to feel the weight of the times we have chosen our own way rather than the path down which GOD invites us to go.

And when we feel the weight of our sin we should quickly realize the size of the debt we owe.

- But now look at the cross.
  - Look at the place where JESUS died so that your debts might be forgiven.
  - To assure that forgiveness, JESUS gave HIS life.

How does that debt compare to anything that anyone has done to you?

- Has anyone really harmed you so greatly that it can't be forgiven, especially in light of the forgiveness you yourself have received?
  - Think for a moment about your life.
    - Is there any grudge you hold? Any debt unforgiven?
- GOD has forgiven you a great debt.
  - Now it's your turn to forgive a small one.