

Sermon Notes September 17, 2023
Peace Lutheran Church
The Holy Gospel of Matthew 18: 21-35
“Boundless Forgiveness”

When a relationship has broken, when a friend has sinned against a friend, when reconciliation is required to find our way back to a safe, peaceful, just, and loving community, we go to one another to speak a word of confession and a word of forgiveness. We do it again, and again, and again until the community - the relationship - is restored. We go knowing that where two or more are gathered, Christ is there, drawing our relationship and our communities and our families back together in love.

Following last week's words in the book called Matthew, the promise that Christ will be with us even in our most troubled and conflicted moments - perhaps especially then! - is this Sunday's gospel. Peter asked a question that many of us would want answered when we take into consideration these conflicts: “How many times do I have to forgive someone?” While Peter's suggestion of seven times might sound wildly generous to most of us, Christ has other ideas in mind. Seven times seven, seventy times seven, or seventy-seven times-what ever the final count is, it seems the intention is that there is no limit to the forgiveness we are called to offer to one another as we live into those longed-for relationships. When we have been forgiven so much, how can we not forgive once, twice, seven, or seventy-seven times? Having heard the words of the psalmist, “You have not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103: 10), how could we not share the same with God's beloved?

Our distant ancestors from the First Testament chose a continued relationship through forgiveness. Here is a crucial point to be made. Let's be clear with the fact that Joseph has a good career these decades later. This does not excuse his brothers' acts of betrayal culminating in selling him into slavery. Joseph has no shortage of reasons to cast aside (or cut down) his brothers for their sins against him, but he chooses the way of forgiveness.

Without rising to the excessive cruelty of sending others into servitude, Paul reminds us that our broken relationships can come from far less as well - occasionally even battles over meals, fasting, and days of holy observance for those customs. While these are not necessarily unimportant, they do not overpower the deep longing of God for His people to dwell in unity.

We wonder what it means to live out our calling as Christians in this world. What kind of relationships do we want? What kind of communities are

we called to be? We long for communities and relationships that seek to draw ever closer to God and to one another. We gather together on Sunday mornings because God has called us to come, to hear words of grace and forgiveness, to eat and drink with one another around a table of love and peace We extend this to the larger community ...wherever we go.

Christ calls us to relationship and reconciliation - with one another and with those we have yet to meet. May the forgiveness and grace given to us by our Father extend through us to all the world. That would be the very presence of God.

