

Willow River Parish

Title: What we have received

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 18:21-35 (NRSV)

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Good morning Church! It’s been almost two weeks since my family and I came to this beautiful Clear Lake. Usually, I felt that time flies, but after my son, Evan, was born on March 19th, I feel that my whole day is too short. Do you agree that time flies? I have lived a relatively short life compared to you, but my life was filled with the grace of the Lord. This is because I met Esther and I fell in love and got married, and now we have a baby that looks like us and live happily ever after. It would be nice if we could appreciate every moment, but sometimes we can complain about the inconvenience ahead of our eyes. In the end, however, God always gave me something nice.

When we vacated our home from the apartment and sent our items to Clear Lake to serve Willow River Parish, we were uncertain where we would stay until the items arrived for complicated reasons. But, a member of the church I served as an intern pastor allowed us to

stay at their home until we left for Clear Lake. They treated us warmly and we decided to call them as our American parents.

Nine years ago, I had an opportunity to stay in New Jersey in the United States for a month. At that time, I was a sophomore studying the Philosophy of Religion at college. With the help of the professor of the class I took, I could stay in the states for a month and have opportunities to see the American ministry served by Korean pastors. When I worshiped at the United Methodist Church where they have an African-American congregation and a Korean pastor as a lead pastor, the pastor shared his sad news that his mother passed away the day before the Sunday. And, after the worship service, the congregation remained, gathered, and prayed for their pastor. When I witnessed the scene, I realized that God's grace and love transcend races, languages, and cultures. And, when I decided to enter a Methodist seminary in Korea after college graduation, that experience captured me, and I wanted to serve a cross-cultural and multi-cultural congregation in the United States as a pastor, so I decided to study abroad in America.

My parents studied Methodist theology in South Korea, and my father was ordained in Korean Methodist Church and he is still serving the church actively. But my family's financial situation wasn't enough to cover the tuition, but God allowed me to study at Claremont School of Theology with a full tuition scholarship. And on January 6th, 2018, just before I came to the states, I married Esther and we came to the states together. Our newly married life was happy, but there were difficulties we didn't expect. Due to a new environment that is totally different from Korea, we experienced cultural, language barriers, and financial difficulties. It sometimes made us forget the grace we received and sometimes complained.

However, God gave me courage and help whenever I faced difficulties, and He sent good people to me. Through them, we were able to learn and experience American culture and ministry. Through the experiences and opportunities, I was able to get this opportunity to serve Willow River Parish. When we said we are going to go Wisconsin to serve Willow River Parish, some people around us said, "Wisconsin...? Well... it's the coldest place," and they worried, but I prayed that I would go wherever God sends me, and I came to Wisconsin believing that it was God's call. So, this is a precious place left to me by God, and a place where I should pray and take care of with all my heart.

I'm still learning American ministry, culture, and English. When I had the first meeting with SPRC on zoom after I came to Clear Lake, I learned an American expression: Eup dah? (I don't know the exact meaning though) Like this, I keep learning, so please let me know if I don't know something.

According to the gospel lesson for today, Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" No matter what sin a member has committed against me, how does forgiveness, seven times unconditionally, come to you? We may think seven times forgiveness is enough, like Peter. But, Jesus said, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times. (In some versions seventy times seven - KJV)" In other words, Jesus said we must forgive others 490 times. 490 times forgiveness is only a symbolic number, which means unconditional and unlimited forgiveness. If Peter's forgiveness is conditional and limited, then Jesus' forgiveness is unconditional and

unlimited.

About forgiveness, Jesus explained with a parable of the Kingdom of heaven. A king and a servant appear in the parable. The servant is not a household slave, but a subordinate official. The debt the servant must repay was caused through mismanagement of the king's resources. He had to repay 10,000 talents to his king. A talent indicates a worker's 15 years wages. Some scholars say that a talent indicated 45 lb. of silver. The debt was unpayable. Casting the servant into prison will be punitive—it will pay him back for his utter mismanagement—but it is utterly beyond the realm of possibility that the servant can repay his debt, no matter how much time is given. Both the servant and the king knew this. The servant's situation was hopeless. He asked for mercy, and contrary to all expectations, the king responds with compassion.

The king of that slave forgave him the debt. But the same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat, and he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him. The debt of the fellow servant was microscopic compared to what the first servant had been forgiven. a denarii indicated one day's wage for an ordinary laborer. However, the first servant did not forgive his fellow servant as he has been treated by the king. This outraged the other servants and they report the fellow's conduct to the king. Then, his king summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?"

The part that we should consider important here is verse 33: "I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" For Matthew, the king represents God, debt represents sin, and servants represent humans. According to Genesis, human beings became sinners because of their disobedience to God's word. We call it the original sin. Due to the sin, Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden. But, God has pitied and loved us, so that even after we were driven out of the Garden of Eden, He gave Adam and Eve garments of skin, and sent prophets to make us obey God's word. And God even sent his beloved son Jesus to this land and let him be crucified on behalf of all our sins. Through the death of Jesus Christ, we are all forgiven by God.

God's love means forgiveness. In other words, no forgiveness, no love. God so loved us and forgave and saved us from death. According to 1 John 4:19 (NRSV), it says that "We love because He first loved us." We are the children of God who believe in the presence of God, believe in Jesus Christ as our savior, and believe in the Holy Spirit. We must love and forgive each other because God first loved us, and He first forgave us. God gave us unconditional grace before we know it. We must believe in this fact and confess every day.

We live by God's grace, but it may not be as easy as it sounds to live by thanking God every day. I read Exodus when it is hard to thank God due to the difficulties I face. Red sea laid before the people of Israel as they moved out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. Moses led the Israelites to the Red sea, but he was almost the target of criticism from the people of Israel when they face difficulties by the king of Egypt and the soldiers who followed them to kill. But the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land and the waters were divided. Moses and the people of Israel experienced the amazing grace, love, and protection of God through the miracle of the Red sea. However, when they crossed the sea

and entered the wilderness to go to the land of Canaan, they began to blame and complain to God and Moses when they face the difficulties of thirst and hunger. Even though they experienced God's love and grace whenever they encounter difficulties, their complaint against God and Moses look foolish. But we realize that we are not much different from the people of Israel.

God has given us unconditional and tremendous grace, but we sometimes forget that fact and have negative thoughts and complaints due to the difficulties ahead of us. Beloved, however, if possible, please remember the grace we have received from God so far. As I said at the beginning of my sermon, I have received a lot of grace from God. I also sometimes have negative thoughts and emotions due to the difficulties of life, but whenever I remember the grace of God I have received, God's grace always makes the current complaints and negative thoughts nothing.

May we always believe these facts, and remember God's grace, and thank Him every day. Amen.