

*.Dan Ince September 13, 2026*

*Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost Proper 19 Matthew 18:21-35*

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, my Lord & my Redeemer. Amen

Momi & I have supported Homeboy Industries for a number of years because they provide an avenue to formerly incarcerated people to a better life. I read the story about Roy Burkhardt with interest based on our own experience with Homeboy. He had the task of finding employment for New York parolees. He wrote about one particular business owner who always found work for the formerly incarcerated people that Roy brought to him. After many years, the employer asked him whether Roy had ever wondered why he worked so hard to find jobs for the rehabilitated people. Then he told Roy his own life story:

When he was a young man, he was working for a company delivering products and collecting the payments. Over time, he stole several hundred dollars from the company. One day, his boss suddenly told him, "Go home. I'll take your route today. Bring your wife and come to my house this evening." He waited at home all day with his wife asking why he wasn't at work. Of those hours he later said, "Don't tell me there isn't a hell. I lived through it that day."

In the evening, the young couple went to the boss' house and was greeted warmly by the boss and his wife. After they had visited in a friendly way, the older man turned to the younger one and simply asked him to tell his wife why he hadn't worked that day. It was an ordeal for the young man, but he began unloading the grim facts of what he had done. His poor wife broke down and wept. Then the boss spoke again, stressing how morally wrong the man's conduct had been, saying, "I could prosecute you, but I'm going to give you another chance." He instructed the young man to report for work the next day as usual. "We will not let you handle money, yet," he said, "but you will have an

opportunity to redeem yourself." So, he went back to work and, eleven years later, he became the president of that company. As he related this story to Roy, his eyes filled with tears and said that this forgiveness experience was the reason that he kept giving other people second chances.

I think that today's Gospel lesson clearly teaches us the principle of mutual forgiveness. Jesus told the story of a king who had a slave who owed him ten thousand talents. This was an enormous sum equal to billions of dollars in today's money. I've read that a talent was the largest unit of money known in that time and ten thousand was the largest sum that can be identified. The king who owned the slave had every right to punish this servant by selling him and his family and all their possessions to help pay the debt, but the slave begged for mercy and forgiveness. Our text says, "Out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt."

I think that, in this parable, Jesus is saying that God is the king and we're the slaves. He is telling us that we've fallen short of the kind of people that God wants us to be. God's holiness and righteousness demands that we work to be a better reflection of God's love for us. God is perfect but we're still a work in progress and in bondage to sin. We can't free ourselves but, for Jesus' sake and because of His death on the cross, God forgives all our sins. Because of Jesus' blood we are reckoned as righteous and accepted by God. So far, so good. God loves us, accepts us, and forgives us.

But then the parable goes on and the story becomes a little more uncomfortable for us because we're called to forgive others as we have been forgiven. The same slave who was forgiven his immense debt is confronted by another slave who owes him a hundred denarii which amounts to just a few dollars. This slave also pleads for mercy and compassion but the first slave responded with, "Pay what you owe". This slave didn't receive the mercy that the King had shown the

first slave and he had other slave thrown into prison. It's no wonder that the King was upset 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 king handed the first slave over to be tortured until he could pay his entire debt.

Along with the good news of the Gospel to us, comes the harsh news that tells us that we're expected to respond to God's forgiveness by forgiving others. As we forgive others, we're also forgiven.

Jesus taught his disciples, and us, to pray for forgiveness as we have been forgiven when we say the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." How many times are we supposed to forgive our sister or brother? Jesus tells us to forgive them seventy-seven times which probably goes against the grain. We might be willing to forgive them once or twice but probably not over and over again for the same trespass. And sometimes forgiving once might even seem like a stretch for us. We might want to hold a grudge rather than take the steps that leads to forgiveness and reconciliation. I've read that, "You don't have to teach someone to hold a grudge, but you have to teach someone to forgive." Real forgiveness goes beyond just words but to the reality behind it. We all need that second chance or third or fifth or seventy-seventh. Abraham Lincoln once said that the best way to get rid of an enemy is to make a friend of him. Leonard Felder wrote in an article titled, "A Fresh Start" "If you have someone from your past with whom you have never been able to resolve differences or express your feelings, now is a good time to start. There is nothing more cleansing than working through your feelings toward someone whose impact on your life is still felt. You do not need to carry on your conflicts forever. Healing the hurt inside can free a person." We are freed as we forgive and are forgiven.

And we are called to forgive from the heart. It's only when we come to understand how the gracious God forgives us, that we can truly forgive

others. We can begin to understand that punishment for wrongdoing is best left to the Lord. As it says in first Psalm, "Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, nor the sinner in the council of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed."

We have God's promise to us that God will take care of the judgment and we don't need to judge anyone else. We can give our grievances, resentments, hurts, to the Lord and ask for God's power to come into our hearts and minds and to transform us, to rid us of our grudges, to heal us of our pain and to forgive us our debts. We can ask for God to forgive us and to give us the power to forgive others.

John Patton put it this way in his book, *"Is Human Forgiveness Possible?"*: "Human forgiveness is not doing something, but discovering something — that I am more like those who have hurt me than different from them. I am able to forgive when I have discovered that I am really in no position to forgive."

In other words, human forgiveness is possible only when we have really experienced God's love and forgiveness. We all need forgiveness and the second chance. Our sins are like scarlet, but they have been made white as snow. We have been washed in the blood of the lamb and cleansed by the suffering and death of Christ. We have been forgiven and now we are asked to forgive one another from our heart.

Thanks be to the God of Love and Forgiveness Amen.