

**The Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity**  
**27 October 2024**  
**Matthew 18:21-35**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the eighteenth chapter.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”

“Oh, you will, will you?”

Ten thousand talents are equal to sixty million denarii. You'll remember from our Lord's parable of the workers in the vineyard that the vineyard owner and the first workers he hired agreed to a rate of one denarius for the day's work. That was a pretty standard rate—a denarius for a day's work. This poor fellow owed his master 60,000,000 denarii. With absolutely no time off—no vacations to tropical beaches, no hunting or fishing trips, no federal holidays, no weekends, not even any sick days—it would take this poor fellow just a tad over 168, 271 years (and that *is* accounting for all the leap years) to earn enough to square this debt. (And what is he supposed to do for a living in the meantime?)

“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”

“Ha!” Literally nobody (not even Methuselah) has time for that kind of patience.

Repaying that debt is literally impossible. So instead, the master takes pity on the poor man and cancels, negates, nullifies, releases, looses, forgives his servant's debt.

The fellow servant also says, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” Now, he owes his fellow servant 100 denarii—100 days wages. That's not a trifle. It's over three months'

wages. But that's just a little more than what "Bride's Magazine" has long said a prospective fiancé should spend on an engagement ring. (I'll reserve my own editorial comments on that bit of financial advice.) But realistically, if this guy takes no vacations, works seven days most weeks, and cuts back on his whiskey and cigars budget, he can reasonably knock out that debt in under a year and still provide for his family.

"Have patience with me, and I will pay you." That's actually doable. But his fellow servant won't even display a little bit of patience, and instead, has this guy thrown into debtor's prison.

Jesus finishes the story: "<sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,<sup>[e]</sup> until he should pay all his debt."

Then, Jesus throws in the punch to the gut: "<sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." Ugh. This is the part which rightfully worries us all. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." "Truth be told, Pastor, I want God to forgive my trespasses better than I forgive those who trespass against me." I can't tell you how many times someone has said that or something similar to me.

We find it hard to forgive those who sin against us. It is instead easy for us to bear grudges and fail to forgive over even trivial things. We want retribution. We want retaliation. At a minimum, we want an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. When someone hurts us, we want payback for that pain. It's only natural. Ah, but you see, that's the problem. It is what's natural. It's what is according to our old, sinful nature. Our Old Adam is the first servant in the parable.

“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything,” is the delusion of Old Adam. According to our sinful nature, we actually believe this fantasy. If we can just try harder, if we can have a little more time, we can please God. If we just work at it, we can stop taking advantage of our neighbor. “Give me a little more time; I can stop the gossiping.” “Let me work at it a little harder; I can stop indulging my flesh in its sinful desires” 168, 271 years. It’s impossible. It’s impossible for us, and it’s impossible for those who sin against us.

Thank God that He doesn’t merely have patience with us. Instead, He took pity on us. And in His mercy, He sent His Son, Jesus, to the cross to pay our debt in full. Because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, we are released from all our sin. The debt is cancelled. We are loosed. We are free.

And it is in that freedom that we are empowered and enabled to free those who sin against us, to cancel their debt against us, to loose them from their obligation to us. It is in the framework of God’s unfathomable forgiveness that we live in forgiveness of one another.

Dr. Luther gets the framework square as he explains the Lord’s Prayer to us. “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”

Having received God’s pity, grace, and mercy through Jesus Christ, having received the forgiveness of our sins, that very same pity, grace, and mercy, that very same forgiveness of sins—God’s forgiveness of sins—flows through us to our neighbor.

Jesus' words to His disciples at the end of today's Holy Gospel are only a burden if you hear them as an eleventh commandment—something else you must do. “Ten: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. Eleven: Forgive your brother from your heart.” If you hear those words as one more thing you must do—one more thing you cannot do—it will be a soul crushing blow. But remember, Jesus did not start there. He started with the master who took pity and showed mercy by canceling a soul crushing debt. It always begins with God and His forgiveness of your sins. He is the source.

So, what do you do when you find it hard to forgive your brother from your heart? Do you plead for more time? “Have patience with me, and I will figure out how to forgive.” No! You stop trying to do it yourself. Instead, you let the pity, grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus flow through you to your fellow forgiven sinner. You take comfort in the faith that you are not being required to give what you do not already have. You rejoice that forgiveness always comes from God. It may come through you, but it comes from God.

You remember that you are baptized. And you take heart that in Holy Baptism, Jesus joined you to His death and resurrection. He forgave your sins and gave you life. He brought you into His family and said, “You are My child, and I will be patient with you; but know that you are Mine because I have already been merciful and gracious to you.”

You come to hear Holy Absolution. And you receive strength from the truth that through your pastor, Jesus says to you, “I forgive you all of your sins.” Thus, He sets you free from sin to do good. Not because you're paying off a debt before His patience runs out—the debt is already paid! He sets you free to be merciful to others, as He has had mercy upon you.

You come to the Divine Service and receive the Holy Communion believing that the Lord's Supper is not here to patch you up and buy you time on earth, but to give you forgiveness and eternal life. Here, the Lord gives you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. The debt is paid, and you are free.

And in that very freedom, the freedom granted by God Himself, you free your brothers and sisters in Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you trust Jesus when He tells you that you can and you will forgive those who sin against you because He has already forgiven you for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—  
Amen