



BIBLE STUDY for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost



Focus Text: Matthew 18: 21 - 35

In Matthew 18 we receive guidelines on how we should conduct ourselves when we are being wronged. It is interesting in the process of forgiving people that it is within our power to make that decision to forgive others. The fact that Peter poses the question to Jesus, how many times should we forgive, shows that he is well aware that he must forgive others who wronged him. He even thought of forgiving people more than once and suggested seven times as an option. However, Jesus responded with the instruction, “Not seven times, but seventy times seven times!” The message Jesus conveys to Peter is quite clear: expect to be wronged again and again, and do not try to keep a record of the number of times. In short, you will be wronged and the number of times this will happen is irrelevant. You are required to forgive. When Jesus suggests seventy times seven times He presents a glimpse of the patience of God with each and every one of us. There are no limits to God’s grace.

The parable that follows in Matthew 18:23-35 reminds us that we who expect God’s mercy for ourselves must show the same mercy to others. Here the master showed mercy to his slave and forgave him his debts. That same slave went out from there and met someone who owed him a lot less than he himself had just had forgiven; but he refused to cancel the debt. Instead, he demanded repayment and threw the debtor in prison.

Forgiving people is within my power. How do I continue praying “Forgive me my sins as I forgive those who sin against me” if I’m not willing to forgive others?

When we consider the range of contexts in which we live our lives, we as individuals all have our challenges and all need to recognise the history that has been inherited. In South Africa some of the people still hold on to the past and it is hard to forgive. We should always remember where we come from but surely we also need to reach the point of forgiveness? This is not easy because we think forgiving someone surrenders some of our principles and allows others to gain some advantage over us. The theologian Lewis Smedes sums up this teaching on forgiveness: “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you”.

(From Word and Worship – Year A 2019-2020; p268)

*O God of Joseph and all his brothers,
your forgiveness transcends whatever wrong exists between us.
Grant us the courage to forgive others,
and to practice reconciliation by the kindness of our speaking,
the sharing of our resources, and the honouring of your desire for good.
Amen.*

