

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The master had earlier shown mercy to the servant. The servant's debt to him was very large. The servant had no means by which to repay the debt. Rather than selling him into slavery with his wife and children to satisfy the debt, at the begging of the servant the master was moved with compassion. He forgave the man's significant debt. He released him and his family. The man was free.

But the compassion shown the servant by the master was quickly forgotten by the servant. He was forceful and aggressive with one who was indebted to him, although that debt was very small. Even though his debtor begged, using the same words the servant had used with the master, still that wicked servant felt no compassion. His heart was cold. He who had been pardoned much had his debtor of little imprisoned.

When the servant's cruel actions were reported to him, he summoned the servant, and spoke those horrible words. The master's Words are neither irenic nor pardoning. His patience is gone; his wrath is manifest. His rebuke of the servant is harsh; he speaks words that are quite jarring. "You wicked servant! Should you not have had compassion on your fellow servant?" Having been shown mercy, the servant should have learned mercy. He should have extended that mercy to others.

Truth be told, it was a question of love. That is the summary of the Commandments. Love fulfills the Law. Against love there is no Law. The master's love was shown in his compassion. Although it would have been just to have him punished, the master, in love for his brother, absolved him and set him free. The servant however, loved money more than men. So the Law had mastery over him. He was handed over to the torturers. That is the work of the Law.

The ability to forgive your fellow servants flows from your love of them. Your love for others is not your own, it has a source. The one who loves his neighbor as himself forgives as he desires to be forgiven. You are not without fault. Your shortcomings, your imperfections, have hurt others. But more to the point, they have offended God. They have separated you from God.

But to say that your sins have separated you from God sounds a little like your sins have a life of their own. They don't. It is you who have sinned, you who have separated yourself from God. And that from a failure of love, which is a rejection of the love that God has shown you.

The sinful world defines love differently than the Holy Scriptures do. To the world love is a personal emotion, something you feel and enjoy. It is a warming of the heart that you experience, and it benefits you. So you can say you love the outdoors, because the outdoors bring you pleasure. To the world loving someone is receiving from them to your advantage.

But that is self-serving and egocentric. That is not what real love is. And that is why divorce is so prevalent even among those who consider themselves Christians. They are selfishly unwilling to do the hard work of love. And that is also why so many couples hesitate to marry. They have no fear of God, and they are unwilling to suffer the inconveniences of true love.

Love is not a personal emotion that is harbored or stored up internally. True love is something that is shown. Love is extended. Love is expressed in benefitting others, in caring for them actively, even sacrificially, in the compassion seen in the master of the Lord's Parable. He gave up what was due him and received nothing in return other than to have helped the servant. And he set him free.

That love, true love, is not always enjoyable. It is seldom pure pleasure. True love often means giving something up that you enjoy. True love requires sacrifice. The fallen world won't suffer that kind of love. Once it doesn't benefit the sinner, the relationship is over. And so the servant forgiven much seized and mistreated the man who owed him so little.

The master extended mercy to the servant. The servant, in turn, could not love his neighbor. So the master's harsh words should drive each of you to consider how you have treated others, how you have loved, even to the point of sacrifice, how you have offered your forgiveness to those who have trespassed, those indebted, to you.

Truth be told, you have expected grace from God that you have not been willing to offer to others. Hear then the words of the Lord, the true Master: "You wicked servant! So My Heavenly Father will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. In love, in true Love, God the Father sent His Son to settle your debt, the incredibly large debt that you could never satisfy yourself, the debt of your transgressions against God and neighbor.

The True King is merciful. He takes your debts upon Himself that your debts be forgiven. It is He that was handed over to the torturers - until He paid all that you owed. It is He that shows you true love. True love requires sacrifice. True love is found in pierced hand and riven side, in blood-stained cross and sealed tomb. True love is found in His three-day death. True love is found in His victory over death. True love is found in the fact that He remembers your sins no more. There is the long-suffering, kind, never-failing love that is the model for all love.

It is He, Christ, the true King, the true Master, that forgives you unconditionally, simply out of His great love. And by His grace, He gives Love to dwell in you in the Person of His Spirit. He works faith in you, faith that extends the love and forgives you have received to others. He gives you faith that, responding to His grace, enables you to forgive others their trespasses as God forgives you. He enables you to love Him, and loving Him to show true love to others.

So it is in love that this day He gives you His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. You kneel with those who need your forgiveness, with those whom you forgive, to receive the One that is the source of all forgiveness. The symbols of bread and wine announce the Love that knows no limit, as Christ places Himself with the Elements and comes to you for your forgiveness. For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who wanted to settle accounts with His servants. In love, true love, your Master is moved with compassion, and He forgives you all your debts. In Christ You are free.

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the Day of Jesus Christ.

St. Matthew 18:21-35
The Fourth Sunday after Michaelmass, 2016 A.✠ D.

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