***Matthew 18:21-35***

***“God’s Math”***

***September 17, 2023***

There’s definitely some Peter in me – how about you?

How much of your life is by the numbers?

How much will this month’s electric bill be?

How many days since I last did laundry and can I get away with one more?

How many more days do we have before a hard freeze hits that will necessitate covering or bringing in plants?

What prices will have gone up in the supermarket between last week and this week?

What age was I when I last saw that friend – because at least one of us looks a lot older?

Peter has accepted the idea of forgiveness here – or so it seems – but he wants to know how many times must he extend forgiveness for the same hurt?

If you follow Jesus, seventy-seven times as it says in the New Revised Standard Version or 490 times as found in the King James Version - that is truly nuts.

It seems like an awful lot of acceptance of the same hurtful words or the same isolation that comes with not being invited or the same old story about why the money being borrowed this time will actually be paid back in spite of the other dozen times when it wasn’t.

The parable that Jesus uses, though, shows the power forgiveness can have in changing the course of a life and relationship but it seems the slave who owed such a huge amount – again we’re in the unfathomable numbers because the 10,000 talents he owed the king would equal roughly $1.5 billion today – and it was wiped clean by the king.

Sadly, the king’s generosity and grace were lost on the slave who maybe was breathing a sigh of relief right then but didn’t fully grasp that he was being forgiven by someone who knew exactly how much he was owed and yet was willing to turn away from the number crunching.

Suddenly, they were no longer the debt ridden one and the debt holder.

It seems that all the slave could do was think about how he got away with something, pulling one over on the old rich guy.

And he then turned around and did exactly what he thought was going to be done to him.

When we don’t learn the lessons of forgiveness, as the slave certainly did not, we will most likely continue to not forgive.

Keeping score, and always wanting it to even out in the end is the cost of withholding forgiveness.

But the even greater cost of withholding forgiveness is not what it does to the one we feel owes us something, it is what it does to us.

It’s clear that the slave didn’t recognize forgiveness and thus was not able to offer it.

When we focus on how much we are owed, we spend a lot of energy figuring out how we will be paid back or how we will be proven right or how we can be sure we won’t get hurt or disappointed again.

The writer and priest Father Richard Rohr points out that “Scapegoating, exporting our unresolved hurt, is the most common storyline of human history.”

The slave here and so many of us today just pass on what we have received.

If someone treats us poorly and if forgiveness isn’t on our radar, there’s a pretty good chance we will pass on the hurt to someone else.

But then there is Jesus who would not have any of it.

He was mocked and driven out of town and even crucified. And what was his response?

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Forgiveness is one of the great gifts of God to whom we owe our very lives and all that we are and all that we love.

We are never, over the course of our entire lifetimes, ever going to be able to repay God for it all – the second, third and 77th chances we’ve been given.

God is not a keeper of IOUs because God wants to be in relationship with us more than anything else.

God’s love is that powerful.

One writer describes it this way:

*Resentment seeps back in
like water into the boat.
You have to keep bailing.

Regret returns
with its lingering hunger.
You have to keep feeding it grace.

Grief comes back,
asking again.
You have to hold it till it's OK.

Love is continually renewed.
It doesn't just stand there like a rock.
It flows like a river.

This is how we live.
Every breath, every heart beat
is God forgiving you.*

(Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Unfolding Light, [www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net))

Who is it that we most need to forgive today?

What deep-seated resentment are we carrying, maybe from as far back as childhood?

Imagine letting that go and how we might be changed?

It could be standing in the way of a truly loving relationship or at the very least, maybe our relationship with our ever-forgiving God.

As we have been forgiven, let us forgive.

That oneness with God, that is the number that truly matters – 1 + 1 = 1

Please join me in praying these words from our United Methodist Bishop, Peggy Johnson:

*Jesus, we admit that we find it hard to forgive, even the first time.*

*But our forgiveness is empowered by your love, which helps us to recognize our own sins against others.*

*Jesus, you have given us the grace to move on with our lives, wanting us to trust in your restorative justice.*

*We understand that your highest priority has always been reconciliation and renewed relationships.*

*Nothing is more important to you than this.*

*Not just once or twice but always.*

*Empower us to forgive with your power and authority.*

*Let the power of love surround all with your saving and healing balm.*

*May knowing the joy this brings to you, give us strength. Amen.*