

In 2008 Dave Carroll took a United Airlines flight from Halifax to Nebraska via Chicago. During the change over in Chicago the \$3,500 Taylor guitar which he had checked in was severely damaged due to mishandling by the United Airlines crew there began a fight for reimbursement. After months of following up with customer relations when United rejected Carroll's claim he exacted revenge by recording a series of songs called the "United Breaks Guitars" trilogy. It received millions of hits on YouTube resulting in United's stock drop in value by \$180 million.

Now we may smile at that and at the imaginative way that Carroll got his revenge on United Airlines. However, we should recognize that this is revenge that is being worked out here and that brings us to today's topic as we continue listening to Jesus and hearing what he has to teach his disciples about how we should live because today's topic is about forgiveness.

In Matt 18:21 we read how Peter came to Jesus and asked about forgiving a brother, that is someone close to him. Was he to do it as much as seven times, clearly no three strikes and you are out here then.

Perhaps Peter was feeling good about himself as he asked this because even the Rabbis only suggested three times. However Jesus' response took the ground from under his feet as Jesus said "not seven times but seventy seven times".

What he was saying was that Peter was dealing in petty forgiveness because if you are counting up to seven times you are not really forgiving but storing up grudges and just waiting till a certain point to exact revenge.

Jesus' command to his disciples and through them to us is "forgive your brother from your heart" (18:35). That is we are to be willing to forgive over and over again.

To explain why and what this means Jesus told this parable about a King who had a servant who owed him a lot of money. When he threatened to put the servant in prison the servant begged for mercy and the King forgave him.

However that servant on finding a fellow servant who owed him just a small amount threw him in prison and refused to have mercy. This greatly angered the King.

So what was it that Jesus wanted Peter and the rest of the disciples to learn about forgiveness?

1. Remember what God has done v23-27

The story Jesus used tells of a servant who owed the king 10,000 talents. We can't be sure how much a talent was worth but when we reflect that in another of Jesus' parables he spoke of people being given 5, 2 and 1 talents (Matt 25:15) we can see that this was an astronomical amount, chosen to make a point of how much the King forgave his servant.

The point of the whole parable is that we who have been forgiven much by the King should be willing to forgive others.

At this point the great sacrifice of Jesus in his death on the cross was yet to happen. For us it is something in the past and which we remember today in our Communion service. We need that reminder because we so easily forget what God has done for us. Forgiveness of others will come easier to us if we can remember the mercy shown to us by God.

Many of us have heard of John Newton the great hymn writer. He became a follower of Jesus on a boat journey across the Atlantic in 1748. On that journey the Greyhound was caught in a violent storm and Newton was at work pumping to remove the water that constantly swept over and through the ship's hull. At one point he stopped pumping to go and offer a suggestion to the captain. The captain heard him and said "If this will not do the Lord have mercy on us." That phrase struck Newton. He thought, "what mercy can there be for me? The ship's chief blasphemer, the loudest swearer, the man who mocked the Lord's existence - what mercy for me?"

God's answer was there is mercy for you John Newton as there is mercy for anyone who will come no matter what their past. Through the mercy of God shown in the death of Jesus on the cross Newton found forgiveness and became a follower of Jesus. He never forgot that mercy of God and that is shown in his great hymn, Amazing Grace, and in his epitaph which he himself composed and which read "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa was, by the mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had so long laboured to destroy."

Today we remember the 60th Anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In her Christmas message in 2011 she made the same point of remembering God's forgiveness when she said, "Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves, from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person, neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are; but a Saviour with the power to forgive. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian Faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships, and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love."

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith and while we may not see ourselves in the terms that John Newton did but I hope none of us is in any doubt of the great debt that God has forgiven us in the death of Jesus. We cannot underestimate the astronomical debt we owe our heavenly Father. All my sins were laid on Jesus, past present and future no wonder John Newton wrote about Amazing Grace. That is what we are meant to see in the way that the King responded to his servant and in the way God has dealt with us.

It is in the light of all that we have been forgiven that we think of the sins that others do to us.

2. A matter of perspective v28

In the story the servant who had had his massive debt forgiven then met another servant who owed him 100 denarii – a denarii was a days wage at that time. It was no small debt but in comparison it was really nothing. That again is the point. It was a slight debt in comparison with the debt of the first servant. So with us, people do bad things to us. They do as Peter put it sin against us but Jesus calls his followers to see these things in perspective, hence the comparison.

One writer in trying to show that comparison in another way said that if the debts were paid in 5p coins the 100 denarii could be carried in one pocket the 10,000 talents would take about 8,600 men each carrying sacks weighing 60lbs of 5ps. If those men were spaced out at a yard they would stretch for five miles. What we need to forgive others is nothing in comparison to what we have been forgiven. But this is not to make offering forgiveness a light or easy thing. It is not, which is why in this as in all our life following Jesus we need his insight and his strength.

We need not just to be able to see things his way as he describes here but his strength to be able to follow him and do what he calls us to do.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who survived the holocaust. She told of how she had heard an unbelievable speech by a man in reconstructed Germany. After the speech he put out his hand to her and said, “Sister God has forgiven me.” She recognised him as one of the guards in the concentration camp where her sister had died. She said in effect, “I could not raise my hand to shake his, but in that awful moment I realised how God’s grace and mercy had been extended to me. What I could not do by my own strength, I did by the strength of God.”

I don’t know what are the sins that others have committed against you nor how often but I want to ask as Jesus does you to see them in the light of the sins we have committed against God.

Then with that perspective

3. Follow the way of Jesus v29-35

The servant who owed just the 100 denarii pleaded for mercy but found none from the servant who had been shown such mercy. Jesus condemned that attitude and in so doing encouraged Peter, his disciples, and us centuries later to offer to others the forgiveness that God has offered to us. That is the way of Jesus and it is the command of Jesus as we see from v35 “forgive your brother from your heart”.

In the light of that three practical things to help us follow Jesus:

a. be willing to forgive. You see the problem for you sitting here this morning is that you are sitting amongst a right load of sinners. We all sin and we are all sinned against and as such we can never claim some moral high ground. But God has in Jesus forgiven our sins and our basic attitude in Jesus

should be to forgive others. There is no room here for a hardened heart or for an unforgiving attitude.

b. Forgiveness should be wholehearted and constant. Jesus response to Peter's seven times show that there is no room for counting the sins done to us and there is no room for us to hold grudges against those who have sinned against us. We are to forgive and do it generously, wholeheartedly and constantly. The adage often used is forgive and forget, and so we should. Jesus here was not looking for a grudging reluctant forgiveness but a heartfelt one consistent with the kind of love which he taught and showed – a love which always wants the best for the other. With such forgiveness goes a forgetting of the hurt as well. We can't go on brooding about it – that is not forgiving! My sins are totally wiped away and forgotten by God and so should the sins of others against me. As I said earlier I realise that is very hard but that is what Jesus calls his followers to do. It is such a different attitude from the world around us where pay-back and revenge are so often the buzz words.

The words of Jesus from Matt 16:24 come to mind, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." For me to be forgiven Jesus took up his cross and sacrificed himself. For others to be forgiven it may well involve me sacrificing part of myself, my will, my wishes or desires for the sake of Jesus and for their sake. The forgiveness we offer should be complete just as God's forgiveness of us is.

c. Pray for those who sin, which is everyone we know. The immediate context of these verses is about conversing with a brother who sins against you. The encouragement in 18:15 is to go and talk to such a brother to help him see what he has done. For forgiveness to happen there has to be a realisation of sin and a request for forgiveness. God in Jesus has offered us his forgiveness but unless we realize we are sinners and ask for forgiveness we will not receive it. God is willing but we have to come to our senses and ask. You may be willing to offer forgiveness but until the other person recognizes their need and asks that forgiveness remains unfulfilled. So we need to pray for those who sin against us as we are willing to forgive them. We have got to be open and willing to forgive and sometimes ask God to stir in those who have acted against us an awareness of their sin so that they might come and ask for forgiveness. For while we may and should always be willing to forgive it is hard to actually do it unless the other person asks for forgiveness.

Friends as I close let me encourage you this morning as you sit in your seat while people are receiving communion to reflect again on God's love, the mercy he has shown you and how much he has forgiven you. Then in the light of that think through your own life, the relationships you have and especially the ones where hurt has been done to you. Pray for those people that God would forgive them, pray for yourself that you would be willing to forgive them wholeheartedly and pray

for them that they would recognise the wrong they have done and seek forgiveness and through that be restored to God and you.