

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Matthew 18:21-35  
October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

The Gospel text appointed for today is a “simple to understand” story. It is both straight forward and direct, so I hope you know I will be straight-forward and direct with you. Here’s what we know from the story:

There was a servant of a very important man who happened to be a king. Think of THE KING. Time came for him to balance his books. One of His subjects had outstanding debts. The servant could not pay the debt and was therefore doomed, along with his family, to live the rest of their lives as a slave in order to “pay” for all the debt this man owed. You see, the debt would be paid to the king by selling him and his family into slavery. This is how the king was going to make his balance sheet come out to “zero” regarding this matter.

The man does the only thing he can do. He begs for mercy. He goes before the king and repents of his sins against the king. The king, out of great mercy, forgiveness the servant’s debt. He takes his eraser, erases the man’s debt and puts in a zero. This sort of reminds me of what happened to me last week while I was at the seminary in Fort Wayne. I always check on my bill to make sure my account reads zero. I asked the cashier to take a look at my balance and he said I still owed more than \$1,300. My balance was not zero. I was hoping the seminary was not thinking of selling me into slavery to pay my debt. A mistake happened. They accidently credited my tuition payment to a seminarian who also has the name “T. Arnold.” Too bad for that guy. Now they have to tell him he really doesn’t have an extra \$1,300 in his account. I hope they he don’t sell him into slavery, but I digress.

Now what comes next is at the heart of the matter for our Christian life today. When the servant who had his debt payed by the merciful King found the people who owed him money, he was not as kind. He physically abused them and put him into prison. The servant who was shown mercy did not himself show mercy. That’s a problem, and the King says so. The reward for this action is punishment. Jesus says, *“My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

Beloved that is a stark warning... and it comes straight from the mouth of our Savior so you know it’s true. He doesn’t mess around with these words. He goes right after it. He says with all certainty that if you do not forgive, you will be punished.

You see, true faith is found in Christians who forgive, because this is actually what a Christian is... we are “Christ” ians... little Christs. Now I know, we are sinners and we sin so we think God can’t hold us to that standard because unlike Christ, I’m not perfect. It is true we are not perfect but God does hold us to that standard. He expects us to forgive, because that is what Christ does... with all mercy poured out. It’s hard... because people owe us and we want to wring their little neck, like the unmerciful servant in the text. But don’t do that. Forgive! Live like a Christian. Christians forgive.

Here is something else Christians don’t do. Christians don’t have other Gods. Christians don’t take the name of God in vain. Christians keep the Sabbath day holy. Christian’s honor their parents and those in authority. Christians don’t murder. Christians don’t commit adultery. Christian’s don’t steal, don’t slander or lie, they don’t covet that which does not belong to them. You get it? Christians don’t do these things. If you do, repent. Turn from doing it ever again. Fall on your knees to the King of all mercy and repent.

True faith, gifted by God brings true repentance and true repentance bears fruit. It takes action. In the text the servant should have shown true repentance by doing what was done to him... showing mercy. Because there was no true faith in the unmerciful servant, his reward was eternal punishment.

Beloved, let this not to be you. Repent with a true faith and sin no more. Show mercy to your neighbor. Do not sin against your brother, sister, wife or husband, mother or father. Show the blessed mercy our Jesus shows you by dying to take away your sins.

We have talked about this word “mercy” in the New Testament before, but it is worth repeating. The word “splanchnon” in the original Greek language was never a word for mercy as we know it until Jesus came along and made it that way. This word was used in Old Testament times to describe “inward parts” of a sacrifice such as the liver, the lungs, and the spleen. We can imagine that when the Old Testament sacrifices were done, these inward parts would be “cut out” and they would fall to the ground... “splat,” like the Greek word “splanchnon.” You see, that’s where we get splat from... it’s an onomatopoeia... a word that sounds like what it means.

This is the word that Jesus turns into mercy. His mercy is poured out from the inside... from deep within. It’s a mercy that is a part of us... part of our insides. It’s not just something we do, but who we are... Like Christians who do the same for their neighbor and obey the commandments. That more than what we do it’s who we are... our insides... from deep from within. You see, in the ancient world the seed of compassion was not the heart, but all the inward parts, the parts that make up your guts. The bowels were the seed of compassion, but I’m not sure it will go over too well to tell your loved one that you love them from the bottom of your bowels. It doesn’t have the same ring to it.

And if you don’t like that illustration try this one on for size... Luther described the Divine Service, our coming together to worship our Lord, as a man coming with an empty sack. The name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is placed upon us like it was at our Baptism. His name of grace is dropped in our sack. We add the word “Amen,”... let it be so! It is in my bag.” Then we confess our sins, us who are empty and void of what it takes to be saved and the pastor speaks the words that come right from Christ, they are Christ’s Words for you, “You are forgiven of your sins,” and God’s mercy fills your sack. The Word of God is spoken as we hear God’s law and Gospel for our lives and our sack grows all the more full. The Divine Service continues with the very body and blood given for you for your life now and forever and your sack is made full.

You see, even more that Jesus making your balance sheet show “zero” because you have no more debt, He gives you everything you don’t deserve in a mercy that overflows from the empty sack that you brought here today. We are more than just “even”... we have all the more. His mercy overflows. And, it should overflow from your sack to your neighbors. That’s what faith does. Faith goes and forgives. Faith goes and sins no more. True faith is abundant in God’s mercy poured out for you today... now and for all eternity.

Beloved, you are called to be the “merciful servant.” This is good news. God does not expect those with the spiritual account of zero to pay out mercy that isn’t there to give. No, our Lord’s mercy flows first from Jesus and His righteousness given to you from the cross. He has paid your debt, and then given you all the more. The Lord of mercy works mercy through Christians. You are one of them. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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