

∨ CARITAS FELLOWSHIP

Parables #3—The Unmerciful Servant

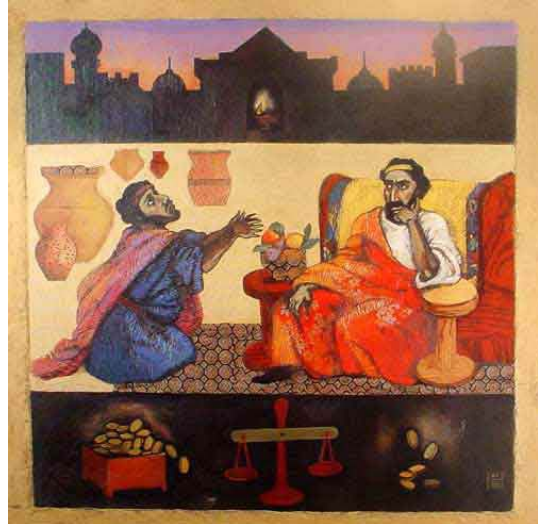
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MATTHEW 18.15-35

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”



ELIE WEISEL @ Auschwitz

“God of forgiveness, do not forgive those who created this place. God of mercy, have no mercy on those who killed here Jewish children.”

S.J. PERELMAN

To err is human; to forgive, supine.

GENESIS 4.24

If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,
then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.”

MATTHEW 6.9-15

Pray then like this:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy Name,
 thy Kingdom come,
 thy will be done,
 on Earth as it is in Heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts
 as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.



For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

1 COR 5.1,2; 2 COR2.6-8

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you...

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

BONO

You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics—in physical laws—every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, so you will sow" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff... That's between me and God. But I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge. I'd be in deep s---. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity...

But I love the idea of the Sacrificial Lamb. I love the idea that God says: Look, you cretins, there are certain results to the way we are, to selfishness, and there's a mortality as part of your very sinful nature, and, let's face it, you're not living a very good life, are you? There are consequences to actions. The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled... . It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of heaven.

MARTIN DOBLMEIER

For Christians, I think the real challenge is to believe at your very core that everything can be forgiven. Because if Christ could forgive those who killed him on the cross in such a cruel and brutal way, then it seems as though nothing is beyond forgiveness.

Also—and Christians have this in common with other faith traditions, as well—we don't approach forgiveness as something that's good for "number one." Sure, it may be able to reduce your blood pressure and your heart rate; that's what science looks at; it's good for you, so do it. But I think the faith traditions, which have a sense of social responsibility, see forgiveness as a way to transform the culture...

Well, my thought was this: all of us have trials. We've all been hurt, and we've all been guilty of hurting

other people. And that goes for both the "great" and the "ordinary," if you want to call them ordinary. But what seems to be unique for all of them is the aspect of community.

So the big question for all of us now is: What is the expectation of the immediate community that we're involved in, in terms of forgiveness? If you belong to an L. A. street gang, for example, you know what the expectation is regarding forgiveness—it doesn't work. But if you're in the Amish community, there's an expectation that you'll extend forgiveness no matter how tragic the occurrence is, and that we together as a community of Amish people will hold you up.

I think that applies not just in extreme situations, but in the daily life of things, too. How does your family speak to you in terms of forgiveness when something happens to you? How does your church talk in terms of forgiveness as a virtue, and in a practical way hold you up...?

If we really want to transform the culture, it's not going to happen with just one person doing it. It's going to take small pockets of communities who decide this is not the way it should be. We're going to band together and hold each other up. And together maybe we can make a difference through forgiveness, moving forward and letting go of the anger...

I used to think of forgiveness, frankly, as a spare tire that you keep in the trunk of your car and you hope to God you never need it. But now I see it in a very different way. I have begun to use forgiveness as one of the windows through which I observe the world. And in doing that, I get a slightly different perception of why family members act the way they do, why community members behave they do, why workmates and associates act the way they do—sometimes even why countries behave the way they do.

These unresolved issues of forgiveness—the inability to come to a point where you feel at peace with yourself and those around you—really become a way to see the world anew. I'm not saying that it's the only way; I wouldn't even begin to say that. But it's one of the paradigms through which I now try to observe the world, and it's been really an interesting experience to do it that way.

I think it's something that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

DANIEL MALONEY (reviewing *Getting Even: Forgiveness & Its Limits*, Jeffrie Murphy)

Christianity changes almost all the calculations about forgiveness. It teaches that man is fallen and so is probably more deserving of the harm that comes to him than he is likely to admit. It teaches that even criminals are precious children of God, who (it can be hoped) might undergo a conversion. And it reminds us that the universe is providentially ordered, and that God will bring good out of evil. This last point is most important because so much of the earlier justification of vindictiveness and punishment rests on the assumption that since everything in the struggle against evil depends on us, we cannot let down our guard. Murphy writes, "If I think that I alone can and must make things right, then I risk taking on a kind of self-importance that makes forgiveness of others difficult if not impossible." Trusting in God's providence, on the other hand, guards us against overreaching in our sense of responsibility.

KLYNE SNODGRASS

God's mercy must not be treated cavalierly. Mercy is not effectively received unless it is shown, for God's mercy transforms. If God's mercy does not take root in the heart, it is not experienced. Forgiveness not shown is forgiveness not known. As Jeremias and others correctly indicate, the parable teaches "Woe to you if you stand on your rights, for God will then stand on his and see that judgment is executed."

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. ... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.