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- Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart.
We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your
sermon or teaching lesson.
I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau,
here with Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger.
They're both professors of homiletics here at Concordia
Seminary, St. Louis.
You can hear all about us in our introductory episode,
but trust me, they're pretty good preachers.
All right, let's get started.
Peter, where are we in the church year?
- Peter: Today we're talking about the 16th week after Pentecost,
season of the church when we think about the Holy Spirit
working among his people for the sake of God's mission.
- Jessica: David, what's the text for this week?
- David: We have Genesis Chapter 50 as the Old Testament reading,
and then Romans 14 and Matthew 18.
- Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would
choose to preach about.
And this week, David, will you go first?
- David: Oh, sure. I'm going to go with the gospel reading,
the parable of the servant who is unforgiving.
And I don't know, I just find there to be a lot in that that
is puzzling and beautiful.
So that's what I'm going to go with.
- Peter: All right.
- David: So I guess what happened was the big thing for me is the idea
that forgiveness
is more than an act, a single act that you do.
It's actually a world that you live in.
So, you know, when you've got this opening question with
Peter,
you know, how often do I, you know, forgive my brother who
sins against me,
you know, and he gives a number he thinks is OK.
And then Jesus ups the number.
And but that still kind of keeps it in this world where I'm
keeping track of how many times I forgive you.
And that reduces forgiveness to just this thing you do on
separate occasions.
And I think what happens in the parable, at least for me, is
that the parable gives us a picture of forgiveness as a world
where you live.
You just I mean, it's just the world that you live in rather
than an act that you're doing and keeping track of.
So that's
- Peter: Just I'll stop you right there, because that's interesting,
because as Lutherans, we quote Luther all the time.
His first thesis is 95 Theses, right, that the entire
Christian life is one of repentance.
- David: Right.

Peter: And so we talk about a life of repentance.
David: Right.
Peter: You know, but what you're bringing up, I think, is a life of
David: forgiveness.
David: A life of forgiveness, right.
Peter: Which corresponds really nicely with that and does capture
this whole new existence.
So I like.
David: Yeah. Yeah. Because I mean, because the parable always
bothered me a little bit.
It sounds like God forgives the guy his sins, right?
He forgives the guy his debt. And then later in the parable,
the king places the guy in prison for the debt that he had
forgiven.
Right. So it makes it sound like forgiveness is something
that God can take back.
Peter: Right.
David: Right. And if you're if you're working with this kind of idea
of itemized forgiveness, you know, after you've forgiven it,
you can't take it back.
You've forgiven it. But but the king does.
The king says, you know, you're going to go into jail and
you're going to stay there until you have paid everything you
owe me.
I mean, you know, so there's this this this troubling sense
that God is playing fast and loose with forgiveness.
And so so one. So so the parable presents that problem.
But when I read it, what I hear is that, you know, the king
at his own initiative, the master's own initiative,
has has invited this guy to live in a kingdom where your
debts are forgiven.
He's got he's got this huge debt. I mean, and I, you know,
for some reason I looked at the notes in the in the Bible and
it said that the, you know,
a talent was worth, I think, six thousand denarii. Right. And
a denarius was one day's labor.
Right. So you've got six thousand days of labor for one
talent.
Right.
Peter: So that's I got so I'm like, I'm a mathematician.
David: I know I am not a mathematician, but I pulled out my phone
and I've got my calculator and I'm like, OK, that's sixteen
point five years of work for one talent.
And he owes ten thousand talents.
So that's, you know, sixteen thousand years. And he's like,
give me patient with me.
I'll pay it back. It's like there's no way you could pay it
back.
But the king invites him to live in a kingdom where debts are
forgiven.
And then he leaves the king. And he goes and he lives in a
completely different world.
He lives in the world where you pay what you owe.

Because he finds that guy who owes him something and he strangles him and chokes him and says, pay me back 100 days worth of wages, you know, in which which is actually quite understandable.

I'm like, if I had been really in debt and it was forgiven, now I know the value of money.

Peter: Right.

David: And so I find somebody who owes me something. I'm like, pay me what you owe you because I know the value of that money. Why? Because I almost got canned because I didn't have enough money. So give me what you owe me.

I completely get where he's coming from. But he's still living in a world where you pay what you owe.

And so when the king brings him back, the king is like, he's not taking away his forgiveness.

He's just saying, you want to live in a world where you pay what you owe?

OK, then you're going to be in prison. Here's what that world looks like. You're going to be in prison until you can pay that debt back.

And, you know, and so it just kind of it kind of awakened me to to kingdom living.

You know, it's just the air we breathe. It's like, you know, your kid says, how many times do I have to take a breath?

Well, in order to live, you always have to breathe. Right.

It's just that's the way it is. The kingdom is a kingdom where you forgive.

And we don't count how many times we forgive.

Peter: Just the thing about the breath is just kind of a neat comment, because when you're alive, you just breathe.

You don't have to be told to take a breath.

David: Right. It's a gift.

Peter: That's what now you can keep this in or not.

But spoiler alert, I want to preach on Matthew 18, too, so we could talk about this this whole time.

And to me, it strikes me that Jesus says at the very beginning, Peter asks him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

It's not asking how often should I forgive him? How much will he sin and how much will I forgive?

And Jesus says, you will do this. So it's not so much as should be. You just when you're alive.

Right. You breathe.

David: You breathe.

This is every breath is, I think Barbara Brown Taylor once said, every breath is a free surprise from God.

It's beautiful language, right? Yeah.

Peter: But and that's this world you're talking about. The Christian life is a world in which you just forgive.

David: That's right. That's the kingdom I'm inviting you to live in. So when Jesus calls us to follow him, all our debts are forgiven, you know, which is amazing.

Right. But the beauty of it is that it's a kingdom where we live in forgiveness.

Peter: And to contrast with the world, the second half of the parable.
Jessica, would you read verses 32 to 35?

Jessica: Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all the debt because you pleaded with me.
And should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you.
And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debts.
And also, my Heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Peter: This week, the forgiveness is central to this.
And it's not just, it's a whole world of men versus the whole world of God where forgiveness is so central.
I think part of what makes this such a compelling passage, and maybe why both of us chose to focus on it, is that forgiveness is really so hard, I think. I think it's really hard to forgive people.
I mean, Jessica, is that your experience at all?

Jessica: I would like to know what you mean by forgiveness. Because sometimes people say, I can forgive, but I can't forget. You know, when I forgive my kids for doing something, they still get the consequence.
They still have to go to their room, even though they said they're sorry.
And I say, you know, I forgive you for doing that, go to your room.
So is that forgiveness? I mean, I would like to know more about what it means to forgive.

Peter: Well, it's a good question. In the little parable here, there seems to be no consequences in the first half.
You're forgiven, debts are paid, done. That's it.
It's not like the king says, well, you realize now that I'm going to have to put you on kind of a secondary status or something.
We'll have some testing period, see if you get back. No, he's just forgiven, taken care of.
And so in a way that shows how unlike our world, the kingdom of God is in terms of forgiveness, that is full and complete and absolute and no strings attached whatsoever.

David: The issue of repentance does come in, right? Because there's a recognition of error.
There's a recognition of having done something wrong, hurtful.
And it's a, you know, the forgiveness is cognizant of the recognition of sin.

Peter: We talk about forgiveness a lot in the church, especially in our church body, which would make you think we kind of have it down.
We forgive, we receive the absolution, we rejoice in that.
It's a wonderful gift of God.

But then taking that little piece of the world as it should be and then living it out in the Christian life, that is so hard.

So hard. And so I think part of the goal maybe with this sermon is to try to create some empathy.

David: Well, you know, it is kind of interesting, isn't it, that, you know, there's that line at the very end, you know, where the king says, or Jesus says, so also my Heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Jessica: Yikes. And, ah, shoot, that sounds kind of hard.

Peter: To which we say the Gospel of the Lord.

David: No, I mean, the reference to the heart makes me think about, you know, just take the story that Jesus tells. So this guy who's been forgiven sixteen thousand five hundred years of labor, it will have changed his heart. And it's a story he has to tell. Right. And how often how often do we as Christians share with each other what we've been forgiven of?

And what would happen if we did? You know, what kind of a community would we be if we were able to share with one another?

Honestly, the things that we've been forgiven of. Well, no, Peter: That'd be tough.

David: Because but but then I mean, you know, then we would we would all see how necessary forgiveness is. It's like air. You can't live without it.

Peter: Well, and then we'd be a little bit more like like brothers and sisters.

David: Right.

Peter: To me, it's it strikes me in this text. It begins in verse twenty one.

If my brother sins against me and then Jesus says in verse thirty five, if you do not forgive your brother from the heart.

Sometimes this this text, I think, is hard to take because we think of some abstract sin against me from someone out in the world.

David: Right.

Peter: And how can I forgive that terrible atrocity or something like that?

But, you know, they're talking about brothers here. Yeah. And we're talking about in the church.

Which means you're part of a family. Which means you're part of a family.

And now you think about your own family. And I mean, you know which of your brothers really goofed up.

David: Right.

Peter: You know which of your children really needed forgiveness.

David: Right.

Peter: And and there's a love and a heart in the family.

Not always, of course. There is that loving heart type forgiveness.

David: And there are families where a person who goes astray as a way of coming back into the family contacts the member of the family who also had gone astray.
You know, because they know they'll get it.

Peter: Right.

David: They know they'll understand.

Peter: They'll understand because they've been forgiven.

David: Because they've been forgiven. Right

Peter: And that gives them a forgiving heart. And in such a situation, you can be honest.

David: Right.
You can be honest about what went wrong. And you can be honest about what forgiveness can actually do to a life.

Jessica: You guys didn't answer my question yet, though. I want to know more of what it means.
If I need to forgive from the heart, what does that mean? Does that mean my kids don't get the consequence for what they did wrong because I have forgiven them?
I know it's a huge big question. How are you going to define it? Because you like give me like some kind of a guidance.

David: This is where the two kinds of righteousness becomes helpful.
Right.
I mean, so you've got this vertical relationship with God and you are forgiven of your sin in the presence of God.
But you have the horizontal relationships with one another where sins have consequences.
And not, I don't see the consequences as punitive consequences, which is, you know, where, you know, you're forgiven, still suffer the punishment of going to your room.
I see the consequences as being protective consequences.
You know, formational consequences. Say something like, you know, you are forgiven.
But it's really hard to live in a kingdom of forgiveness.
And let me help you think about how we live in that kingdom.
And that then leads you into discussions of things you do, things you don't do, because this is how we live in that kingdom.

Peter: Yeah. No, that's really good.

David: What the text does for me is the text kind of causes me to stop thinking about forgiving individual sins.
And to start thinking about what does a kingdom of forgiveness look like? What kind of relationships grow there?

Peter: Right.

David: What type of transparency, what type of love, what type of, you know, what type of world is that where all is forgiven so generously and extravagantly?
It's not a world where you grab somebody's throat and ask, you know, give me the hundred denaria you owe me because you know the value of money now, because you've learned your lesson.
It isn't that kind of a world.

Peter: So I'm wondering how the Old Testament reading from Genesis 50 is kind of it's about forgiveness, too, of course.
And it's between brothers.

And so you've got that. What I found kind of interesting to make it maybe a connection to that text is, I mean, I knew this, but I hadn't thought about it a whole lot. The brothers said, he's probably not going to forgive us. So let's tell him our dad wanted him to forgive.

And it kind of worked.

You know, Joseph then was forgiving.

But it does show what a family is like when you've got a father who desires forgiveness.

Jessica: Did you guys read Daniel Pavla's book on forgiveness?

Oh, it's excellent. It's very good.

And the image that whenever I have trouble forgiving, I always remember this one.

It's water. It's a flood.

God just like drenches you with his forgiveness.

It's everywhere.

It's so much that your basement is flooded and your lawn toys are floating.

There's water everywhere.

And then when your neighbor comes over and asks for a drink of water, are you going to say no?

David: Oh, that's a great image.

Jessica: Yeah.

David: Well, and that's that's kind of this thing, right?

So the the amount of money that was forgiven is astronomical, probably more than the annual revenue of Rome.

And so you're just swimming.

You're swimming in this credit that has been given to you.

And then, you know, how on earth could you notice your neighbor owing you this much?

Right. So it's the same thing.

That's really I love that image.

Jessica: Yeah.

David: That'd be a good image to start with.

Right.

You know, you have an abundance of something that somebody else needs.

And the question is, are you going to, you know, take away or are you going to give out of your abundance?

You know.

Peter: It's not as if we have to conjure up the mercy on our own accord or the forgiving heart or the magnanimous spirit.

David: Right. Which is why I like that imagery of the water.

Peter: Right.

David: You have no control over the fact that your basement is flooded and somebody said, can I have a cup of water?

Peter: And this is where the the the the gospel of forgiveness of sins has to dominate.

And well, in all preaching, but in this sermon, that the only thing that's going to take us from the world of tit for tat and kind of how many times do I have to do this?

The only thing that's going to take us from that world is the promise of God in Christ,

that we are forgiven freely and purely out of his grace and his mercy.

And that actually has the power to change hearts and lives and families and the church.

Jessica: That's all for today.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

David: I almost got canned because I didn't have enough money. So give me what you owe me.