

*21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

A week ago she was robbed. Luckily the robber tried to sell the silverware in the nearest jewelry store he could find. In a short time he was in custody and the silverware was being held as evidence against him. Once the door he kicked in is replaced, everything will be as it was before the robbery.

Well, not quite everything. Before the robbery she lived in the illusion that her home was safe. Now she and all the others who share her neighborhood with her know that their homes are not safe from robbery.

Before the robbery the thief was unknown to her but she will always know his name from now on. The police said that he was high on drugs. She will never hear about illegal drug users without thinking about him.

Before the robbery she did not give much thought to security for her home, now her mind and her conversations with others will focus on security.

And now when she prays in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" will she think of the man who broke into her house?

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother if he sins against me? As many as seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you seventy-seven times."

How many times would a robber need to be forgiven for breaking into a house? One time? Is that how forgiveness works? Or will that robber need to be forgiven every time the wind blows and the house creaks and she lies awake – afraid? I think of a girl who was kidnapped and raped and who talked about forgiveness years later. She said that forgiving was not a one time event but that she had to forgive again and again as she lived in the aftermath of being violated. But she said that without forgiving she could find no peace.

At the men’s bible study Frank describes not forgiving as renting space in your head out to the one who has violated you. Renting out space in your head. It is bad enough that a home or a body are violated but to let the violator take up residence in your mind – that is the worst violation of all.

After Peter’s question about forgiving Jesus put sins against us in a bigger context. He told a story about a king who was owed a ridiculously large debt by a slave. 150,000 years of work it would take to pay off this debt. The slave begged for mercy, the king forgave the debt. Then the slave came across a fellow slave who owed him a debt that would take a hundred days of work to pay off. The fellow slave begged for mercy but the slave had him thrown into prison. When the king heard about it he took back his forgiveness. The slave who had been forgiven was thrown into prison forever. Then Jesus said, “So my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

In Christ God forgives you an enormous debt. This week I asked someone, “When I say in worship, ‘I announce to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins.’ do you believe your sins are really forgiven by God?”

She responded, “No, I do not. It is too easy – I have to do something to pay for my sins.”

But what could we pay God? God created all the gold and silver – what could any of us give to pay God? What does God need from us? God could create a million people in a blink of an eye who are better than you or me. A billion people who would love and serve and obey God better than we could ever do. So what could we give God beyond a cry for mercy?

Yet the Father in heaven before you or I even existed had mercy and sent his son to be forgiveness for us – God’s love for us, God’s mercy for us. Jesus lived and died and was raised to make you as right with God as he is. There is not a number big enough to express what we owe God but in Jesus God says, “I will take care of it. I am paying the bill this time – every time.” That is why I was called to stand before you and speak the precious assurance, “I announce to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins.” Not once, not twice God forgives you but always and forever. Jesus wants us to be like him in this – forgiving one another.

A house broken into – a girl kidnapped and raped – towers violated by airplanes crashing into them. What shall we carry in our minds? Who will we rent out space to?

God’s heart and mind are not filled with what you owe but with love. Remember that. Amen.