Matthew 18:21-35

17th Sunday after Pentecost  
October 4, 1987

One Sunday morning, some years ago, a woman shook my hand following worship and said, "Good sermon this morning, Pastor, they really needed to hear that.

Now I don't want any of you to say that, or even to think that this morning, God's word is preached this morning to enter through your ears into your heart. God is not speaking to your neighbor, his word is not for that person on the other side of the sanctuary, but for you, and you alone.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

A king wished to settle accounts. A servant was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents, the amount that a worker would be able to earn in a hundred and fifty thousand years. When brought before the king, the servant pleaded, Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. Now the king might well have laughed, some patience that would be to wait for 150 thousand years. But having pity on the servant, the king forgave him his debt.

As he left the king's presence he passed a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii, 100 days wages. Grabbing him by the throat he demanded, pay what you owe." Have patience with me, and I will pay you came the reply. But the forgiven one would not be forgiving. He threw his fellow servant into prison. When the king heard of it, he threw him into jail, vowing he would not get out until he had paid the last penny.

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

He was a drunk. Twice he had caused serious accidents. That day back in 1962 was the third time. He pulled out in front of their car. Sherida, a bright blond five year old was thrown into the windshield. Never again would she walk, never again would she go to school, always from that day on her speech would be like a recording played back at too slow a speed.

Forgive?
Many of you saw the article in the Journal, the black girl who stands alone on the playground. The white girls won't let her jump rope with them. A mother wants her daughter not to live with the hatred and prejudice she has suffered under all her life. Her daughter's pain is magnified a thousand times in the mother's breast.

Forgive?

We can't afford two pastors I heard him saying. As if I and my colleague were a luxury. I had confirmed him, baptized his child, visited his grandmother, officiated at her funeral though she was without a church. I had given to him and to his family the very best that was in me, but now as so many workers have heard in this part of the country, he felt he could no longer afford me. A satellite dish for his TV, a fine new stereo, a mansion of a house he could afford, but I was costing him too much.

Forgiven?

This is a hard word from Jesus. The same hard words that we pray in the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Now I understand Jesus point. After God has forgiven my sins that merit me only an eternity of punishment, how can I fail to forgive any sins against me. To deny my brother forgiveness is like being given the whole of lake Erie for my thirst, but refusing to give you even a thimble full.

Forgive your brother from your heart, Jesus says.

I can't. When someone hurts me it is as if I have grabbed hold of an electric wire. I know I want to let go, that if I am to stay alive I must let go, but the bitterness and the anger and the desire to get even or even better than even are the current in that wire that paralyzes my hands upon it. Let go, you who love me shout, but the shouting does no good.

Christ my brother, has done a foolish thing. He has wrapped his arms x
around me to pull me free. The killing current has passed through him, to save
my life he has given his. My brother and my Lord.

Forgive. Through Jesus Christ God will do it in you. He puts in you
a new heart, forgiven and forgiving. With men it is impossible, but with
God all things are possible.

God has prepared a table here. We come like that servant who came to the
king, on our knees begging God's patience with us. But God
is more than patient, canceling every debt and obligation and sin in the
body and blood of his son. We stand a new people, God's own people, sent forth to live as his new people in this world. The parable is our
story, yet through the grace of God, given a new and happy ending in us.
Amen.