

Matthew 18:21-35

- I'm sorry.
- My mistake.
- My apologies.
- Do you forgive me?
- Sorry bout that
- I had that wrong.
- I owe you an apology
- Yep....Today our Gospel teaches us all about forgiveness.
- everyone who hears this parable gets it...how could he possibly not overlook that (relatively) minor debt when he had just been forgiven an impossibly huge one?
- The answer, I think, has to do with our love for counting, calculating, and keeping track.
- While the unforgiving servant's debt to his master has been wiped clean,
- he immediately moves on to the ledger HE is incessantly keeping and focuses on the debt his fellow servant owes him.
- But notice he is not alone in this frame of thinking...
- Notice, where Peter starts the conversation: he asks Jesus for a number.
- He wants to know just how much will be expected of him, how much is reasonable, how much is required.
- It's not that Jesus wants Peter to increase his forgiveness quota,
- it's that he wants him to stop counting all together simply because forgiveness,
- like love, is inherently and intimately relational rather than legal and therefore cannot be counted.
- Had Peter asked Jesus how many times he should **love** his neighbor,
- we'd perceive his misunderstanding: love can't be quantified or counted.

- But he asks about forgiveness and we miss his mistake.
- Why? I think that it's because we tend to treat forgiveness as a response to the law.
- You know, when someone screws up we can either punish or forgive that person.
- Because where law regulates behavior by holding us accountable to morals and value
- and makes room for relationships to flourish –
- the law does not govern actual relationships.
- The law can claim that it is right to help someone in need and wrong to hurt that same person,
- but law cannot make us friends with that person,
- let alone make us love him or her.
- Forgiveness, as an expression of love, is not about regulating behavior but rather about maintaining and nurturing our relationships.
- Author and research professor Brene' Brown writes in her books, that humans are the only species that are hardwired to be in relationship with others.
- We long for it, respond to it, seek it, yearn for it.
- And yet,
- right now... our world is sorted and divided more and more each day.
- Martin Luther realized that some of God's favorite things to do are
- to forgive those who seem unforgivable,
- love those who feel unlovable,
- and make right those things that seem so persistently in the wrong.

- So, I think, with forgiveness – when we realize that forgiveness is not primarily God’s expectation but rather God’s gift,
- We can settle into that mercy and grace and find ourselves able to turn that mercy and grace toward others.
- Even when such forgiveness doesn’t seem possible – because, yes, forgiveness will always be really hard – I am still comforted by the fact that it’s possible for God.
- Let me say that again: Forgiveness is a possibility.
- forgiveness – whether God’s or ours – interrupts the relentless cause-and-effect (and eventually eye-for-an-eye) rhythm of the world.
- To wrap it up with a bow: the very possibility of forgiveness – creates sheer possibility: *things do not always have to be the way they are.*
- May we find this not only comforting, but empowering...
- Amen