

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**Reading for Revised Common Lectionary –Pentecost 15
Matthew 18:21-35**

**13 September 2020
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Forgiven, Healed, and Set Free by Grace!”

A man owed tens of millions of dollars and the entire debt was forgiven. And what does he do?
He goes out and finds the guy who owed him \$20 and when he can't pay, has him thrown in jail!

So what does that have to do with us?

We don't know owe tens of millions of dollars and we don't have someone who owed us \$20 thrown in jail!

But of course it does have something to do with us – with all of us, with each of us.

And yet, sometimes it's hard to recognize that behavior in ourselves.

So let me take you on a journey in your mind and see if that helps.

Close your eyes. And take a deep breath.

Now I want you to imagine emptiness, empty space, like in outer space.

And in that space I want you to imagine something that looks like a long tape measure –
maybe 6, 7, 8, 9 feet long.

When you get up close to it, you discover it's not actually a tape measure, but rather a timeline –
a timeline of your life.

It begins the moment you were born and it ends the moment you die.

And on that timeline is

everything that you've thought, everything that you've said, everything that you've done,
everything that you've learned, and everything that you've experienced.

The timeline is not you and it's not your life – but rather it's your life situation.

It's the things of the body and the mind and the heart, not your spirit.

Now imagine a circle, a circle not much bigger than the width of the timeline,
a circle that travels along that timeline.

That circle is you, it's your spirit, it's the pure essence of who you are.

It's your life – not your life situation.

Now that circle that is you is designed to float freely above the timeline of your life situation
in utter trust and peace and joy.

But what happens is that you and I – we – pick up things and carry them along.

We pick up faults and fears and failures; we pick up regret and remorse and resentment;

we pick up stress and strain and strife; we pick up memories of the hurts that have been inflicted on us.

And all of those things weigh us down and hold us back and keep us mired down in negativity
so that we are no longer free to float above in that positive place God desires for us.

When God forgives us, God removes our sins as far from us as the east is from the west!

When God forgives us, God remembers our sins no more!

And when we accept that gift of forgiveness and mercy and grace,

then we no longer remember our sins – or the sins of others.

So imagine now that the circle that is you has been emptied and cleansed and unchained
from every harmful, hurtful, hateful memory,

and can once again move as easily and freely as on the first day of your life.

Take a deep breath and open your eyes.

The man who was offered the gift of forgiveness of tens of millions of dollars
never unwrapped the gift, never appropriated it, never put it to use,
because if he had, he would not have even remembered the guy that owed him 20 bucks.

How many of you have ever watched the movie Groundhog Day?
It's a story of someone who is trapped into living the same day over and over and over again.
At first it seems like pure hell.
But it's actually a story of someone who is offered heaven,
who is offered forgiveness, a second chance, a do-over.
At first he is bound by everything that has shaped him
into the selfish, arrogant, unkind man that he is.
But over time he begins to understand that grace sets him free to live in a new way.
Every day another burden is lifted,
every day a chain is broken,
every day a stain is washed away.
And as the harms and hurts and humiliations of the past are forgiven,
he is no longer compelled to react out of his pain
but is set free to act with kindness & compassion & care.

There are so many hurts that we carry, some going back to our childhoods.
If someone thinks his parents loved his brother more than they loved him,
and he never experiences the healing power of God's grace,
then he may go into every other relationship with a defensiveness
that manifests in bullying.
If someone didn't get enough physical affection as a child,
and she never experiences the healing power of God's grace,
she may be driven to fulfill that need in inappropriate ways.
Or if so-and-so hurt me, and we haven't worked through that hurt to get to healing,
then every time I meet that person I will at some level expect to be hurt again,
and so may actually act in ways that will insure that I do get hurt.

God loves each and every one of us with a perfect love.
When God forgives, when God grants us mercy, when God gives us the gift of grace,
and when we take that gift and unwrap it and put it to use,
when we step into it and live in that place,
then there's no room left for any hurt or any fear.
There is only the freedom of grace and mercy and love.

Know that it doesn't matter what you have done or what's been done to you.
God is able to remove every hurt and every fear.
All we have to do is allow God's grace into our hearts. **Amen**