Trinity 15 Forgiveness

Sunday, 13th September, 2026

By The Reverend Ruth Li

Scriptures: Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103:6-14; Romans 14:7-12; Matthew 18:21-35

There have been many wars, and there are many wars in the world currently. The war between Russia and Ukraine has been going on for over four years since February 24th, 2022. The conflicts between the Arab nations and Israel have continued ever since Israel became an independent nation on May 14th, 1948. Even in our own nation, the Bondi massacre is an example of people who want to commit harm against other races and faiths of people in our own land. Is there any way to stop wars and unrest? Today's Gospel is the best guide to ending all of humanity's wars and conflicts by starting with ourselves: That is, forgiveness.

In today's Gospel, Peter asked the Lord how often he should forgive his brothers or sisters' sins against him. This showed that Peter had limits to his forgiveness. However, the Lord Jesus' answer to Peter's question is to forgive seventy-seven times. It means that true forgiveness does not keep a score. Counting is not true forgiveness. Jesus knows that there is no true forgiveness in humanity. Forgiveness is the life that comes only from Jesus Christ. Today's parable tells us that forgiveness is a gift coming from God's boundless grace.

Jesus tells us a parable this morning which is about a servant who owed his king "ten thousand talents" and could not pay; "the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made." (Mt. 18:24-25)

A talent amounted to about six thousand denarii. At the rate of six denarii a week, it would take a labourer a thousand weeks to earn just one talent! During his lifetime, it would hardly amount to a thousand talents! But this servant already owes the king "ten thousand talents"! A vast unpayable debt.

When the servant appeared before the king, he was penniless. By the royal decree, the servant's family and all his possessions were ordered to be sold and the money placed in the king's treasury (v25). The servant's possessions would be a small part of the colossal debt.

The servant falls to his knees before the king, asking for mercy and promising to pay the king everything (v26), even though both of them knew it was impossible. The king was moved with pity on hearing the servant's plea. It was out of sheer compassion, grace, and mercy that the king granted this servant far more than he had asked for and completely forgave his huge debt and released him from his punishment (v27). Sadly, the servant went out and "came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seized him by the throat to pay it. (v29). We should know that one hundred denarii amounted to one six-hundred-thousandth (1/600,000) part of the previous forgiven sum. When the fellow servant pleaded with him, he threw his fellow servant into prison, waiting for him to pay off the debt (v30). As a result of the judgment, the king reimposed the former sentence upon the cruel, unforgiving servant, even adding more to it (v34).

This parable conveys a simple yet sobering message: Our Lord forgives us on a daily basis. Therefore, we should have mercy on each other, as the Lord Jesus has mercy on us (v33), and therefore, our heavenly Father will also have mercy on us. Through our forgiveness of others, we bring God's Kingdom (v23) to earth as it is in Heaven (Mt. 6:9-10).

The king's forgiveness of his servant's debt is withdrawn when the servant does not show the same mercy to those indebted to him. It is one of many occasions when Jesus teaches that forgiving and being forgiven - showing mercy and receiving mercy - are inextricably related. Our forgiveness of others is not a matter of obedience to an external command, but an expression of God's life within us.

The forgiveness shown by Joseph in today's Old Testament reading is also the fruit of God's activity, not simply a human work. Jacob's other sons are understandably fearful that, after his father's death, Joseph will unleash some long-held resentment on them. Joseph reassures them of his good intentions: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today." Joseph's forgiveness flows from his recognition of the providence that has been at work throughout the story, in the midst of human arrogance, betrayal, and deceit.

In our Gospel, Jesus' invitation to each sinner is to receive his forgiveness, and in that very act to embrace the vocation of manifesting his mercy in their lives.

As baptised people, modelling forgiveness in our lives, we become gracious people, living as one, in the Body of Christ-the Church- as His new creation (2 Co. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) for His glory (Mt. 5:16; Ro. 11:36; 1 Co. 6:20 & 10:31). As a result, our Church will be full of unity and joy in the presence of the Lord, in every gathering and shared work. Therefore, as a consequence, we will carry on this joyful life into our community and society as the light and salt that preserves civil life for the heavenly Kingdom.

This is echoed in the words of the hymn: Praise my soul, the King of Heaven; To His feet thy tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me His praise should sing?"

The great poet William Blake wrote: "Mutual forgiveness of each vice, such are the gates of paradise." C. S. Lewis said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive."

Forgiveness is the gift from God, through Jesus Christ. Let us receive this gift of forgiveness, and learn from today's parable of the unforgiving servant to forgive one another, love one another, and live for the peace of the Lord.