22nd Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1957

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IN NOMINE JESU

St Matthew 18: 32-35 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

FORGIVEN -- FORGIVING

Do you know of anything worse than sin? Sin is the mother of every sorrow that has pierced the human heart. Sin is the cause of every tear that has welled from the eye, every pain that has plagued the body, every anguish that has tormented the soul, every war that has drenched the earth with blood, If we could remove sin from the world, we would have heaven on earth, and we would not need to go to heaven when we die. The fact is, we couldn't die. "The wages of sin is death," says the Holy Scriptures. But where there is no sin, there can be no death. Had sin not entered into the world, Adam and Eve would still be living today.

And the pity of it all is this: sin does not stop its terrible work when this world comes to an end. After judgment day, the horrible consequences of sin will be fully felt by all who are eternally damned. Concerning the rich man who went to hell, we read, "And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in the flame." And our Savior in describing this awful place says, "There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." One of the most horrible things in hell will be for the damned to have to listen to the awful weeping and howling of the other damned in hell, who gnash their teeth in eternal, unending pain.

But as sin is the greatest evil in the world, so the forgiveness of sin is the greatest blessing. When we pray in THE OUR FATHER, "Forgive us our trespasses," we ask God not to reckon our debts to us. We ask God to remove both the guilt and the punishment of our sins. We petition Him to blot them out forever and to remember them no more.

The very fact that Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses" shows that we have debts which need to be forgiven. There are some who believe that as soon as a person becomes a Christian, he no longer sins. They believe that they themselves are holy and claim that those who still sin are not Christians. But St. John tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, to whom our Lord entrusted His mother as He hung on the cross -- the same John includes himself when he says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." Rightly does Luther say, "We daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment." Make no mistake about it, you and I are sinners. Every one of us is a sinner.

However, while we confess that we are sinners, this does not mean that we think lightly of sin, There is a big difference between a pig that loves to wallow in the mud and a child that falls into the mud and runs crying to his mother. Christians do not love sin. They hate it. They do not desire to sin. They fight against sin. But to their sorrow they must confess that still they daily sin much. They sin if not in what they do, then in what they say, or in the innermost thoughts of their heart. Not one of us can stand up and honestly say, "I love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my mind." Yet Jesus tells us to do just that. Not one of us can honestly say, "I love my neighbor as myself." Yet Jesus commands us to do just that.

But thanks be to God, there is forgiveness for our sins. This forgiveness is obtained not by fasting, not by expensive pilgrimages to so-called holy shrines, not by paying a minister, priest, or rabbi, not by torturing ourselves, not by tears or remorse. God says, Romans chapter three, "By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified." But we are fully and freely forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own dear Son. "Christ His own Self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us of all sins." "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of

the world." Christ, the innocent One, dies for us, the guilty. It is in His name that we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses."

As Thou, O Father, didst forgive David the murderer and adulterer, so also forgive us. As Thou didst forgive Peter, who so cowardly denied Thee thrice, so also forgive us. As Thou didst forgive the prodigal son who wasted his money and time and talents in riotous living and in drunkeness, so also forgive us. As Thou, dear heavenly Father, didst forgive Paul who persecuted the early Christians, so also forgive us. Yes, dear Father, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Let us not forget that Jesus added these words, "As we forgive those who trespass against us. We are not to say, "Forgive us as we forgive our friends or our brother, or a person who insults us only once or twice, or someone who injures us only slightly." But we ask God to forgive us as we forgive everyone and anyone who sins against us in any manner. No matter who the person may be, no matter how often he sins against us, no matter how deeply he may have hated us, we are to forgive him from the heart. Peter once came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? The Savior's answer is significant, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but until seventy times seven." In other words, there is to be no limit to our forgiveness.

This is precisely the point of our Gospel lesson for this morning, the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Here was a servant who owed the king ten thousand talents, which in our money would run into the millions of dollars. Yet the servant pleaded, "Have patience with me and I will pay you all!" The king's heart was moved with pity and he graciously cancelled the entire debt. This same servant, however, went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred pence, or about seventeen dollars in our money. He laid hands on the man, took him by the throat and said, "Pay me that thou owest." His fellow servant fell down at his feet and pleaded with exactly the same words which he himself had used when he

asked the king to forgive him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." But this unmerciful servant refused to forgive him his insignificant debt and had him thrown into prison. The other servants, who had witnessed his merciless conduct, reported it to the king. In anger the king said to him, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Then in anger the king delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. Our Savior then ended this striking parable with these words: "So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses." If we will not forgive, God will not forgive us; but rather we call down upon ourselves the fierce anger of the Almighty.

Jesus further points out that when we forgive, we must do so from the heart. Not only are we not to scold the person whom we forgive or speak evil of him after we forgive or bear ill-will toward him, but we are to be friendly toward him, speak kindly to him, give him the hand of fellowship, help him in the hour of need. During one of the persecutions of the Armenians by the Turks, an Armenian girl and her brother were pursued by a blood-thirsty Turkish soldier. He trapped them at the end of a blind alley and murdered the brother before the sister's eyes. The sister managed to escape by leaping over the wall. Later she became a nurse. One day a wounded soldier was brought into her hoppital. She recognized him at once as the soldier who had killed her brother and had tried to kill her. His condition was so grave that the least neglect or carelessness on the part of the nur nurse would have cost him his life. But she gave him the most painstaking and constant care. One day when he was on the road to recovery, he recognized her as the girl whose brother he had slain. He said to her, "Why have you done this for me who killed your brother?" She answered, "Because I have a religion which teaches me to forgive my enemies."

This is the way that David dealt with Saul who had made several attempts to murder him. This is the way Joseph dealt with his brothers who had made

his life bitter for him when he was a boy and had sold him into slavery. This is the way Jesus dealt with His enemies who nailed Him to the cross. His prayer for them was "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let us not allow our pride or our dignity to keep us from taking the first step when we are wronged. Did not God take the first step with us? Did He not send His Son? Did not Jesus take the first step with us? Did He not suffer and die on the cross? Are we greater than God, more dignified than His Son? As Christians, then, may God move us by His Holy Spirit to pray from the heart, "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Amen.