

In our Divine Service liturgy, from Psalm 130, we hear these words: *“If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”* Were God to keep a black book with a record of every sin that we have ever committed, including those sins where we failed to act, but should have, life would be severely difficult, and facing death would be unbearable. We could not sleep at night, and we would be afraid to die, for we would be terrified with the knowledge that God has, written before Him, every black mark with which to justly condemn us and cast us into the fire of hell.

How precious, therefore, are the words that follow in Psalm 130: *“But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.”* With God, with our God, there is forgiveness. This is why we are able to sleep at night. This is why we are able to face death with peace in our hearts. This is why we can live each day with joy. Our sins are forgiven. Our God forgives us. He forgives you. He forgives me. *“No one could stand, Lord, if You kept a record of sins...but with You there is forgiveness!”*

Now, we are human. We are like Peter in our text. There must be a limit to forgiveness, he thinks. *“Seven times? That’s a generous number of times to forgive the one who sins against me. What do You think, Jesus? Don’t You agree? Seven times?”*

This is the way we think, is it not? With those who sin against us, but even more with God. Our patience grows rather thin with certain people. We reach down within ourselves to forgive them, but it just isn’t there. We’ve reached our limit. Enough is enough. Peter may be right. Seven times seems like a good number. Everything, even forgiveness, has its limits.

And if this is the way we think with regards to those who sin against us, it must be the way God thinks toward us and our sins against Him. How often will God forgive me? His patience must be wearing thin. I repeat the same sin again and again. Surely, He has a limit on the number of times He will pardon me. Maybe I’ve reached that limit.

But then Jesus answers Peter and us with these words: *“I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven!”* Don’t bother doing the math. Jesus is saying that forgiveness has no limits. With how we are to forgive each other because there is no limit with how God forgives us.

This is good news, and this is bad news. It is good news because you and I are the servant in the parable who has an impossible debt of ten thousand talents. A debt he cannot pay. A debt we cannot pay. But this is good news because, no matter how great the debt, his slate is wiped clean. The debt is forgiven. We are forgiven. Every last sin is forgiven.

How can the king do this for his servant? It’s because he asks him to have patience with him. Now, the servant is a fool for thinking that, with enough time, he can pay off his debt. But the king has pity on him. He forgives his entire debt because *“he pleaded with him.”*

“*Forgive us our trespasses.*” We plead before God every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. Not, “have patience with me and I will pay for my sins.” But rather, “forgive me, for Jesus’ sake forgive my trespasses.”

That’s why our King releases us from our debt. Jesus paid it for us. That’s what Gethsemane, and the whips, and the crown of thorns, and the nails, and the cross are all about. It was all to pay the debt of sin that we owe. A debt we cannot pay. But Jesus paid it. And not just for some. For all! He paid that debt for every human being, for every sinner. Yes, for you, and for me.

This is good news! Now hear the bad news. We forfeit this forgiveness when we refuse to forgive those who sin against us. The king in the parable calls the servant he forgave a “*wicked servant,*” not because of his incredible debt of ten thousand talents, but because he refuses to forgive his fellow servant the debt that is owed to him. In his anger, the king hands the wicked servant over to the jailers, yes the torturers, until the entire debt is paid. Which is forever, because he can never repay his debt. The debt that is cancelled is put back in place, and all because the servant refuses to forgive.

How foolish and how stupid is that wicked servant. The king had given his life back to him. But he throws it all away simply by refusing to forgive a fellow servant.

This is how foolish and stupid we are if we refuse to forgive: an ex-spouse, a parent who has failed us, a coworker who hates us, a fellow church member, a pastor, a government official, anyone who has wronged us – once, twice, seven times, or repeatedly again and again. It’s bad news, the worst news of all, for the one who refuses to forgive.

But how can we forgive again and again? We reach down inside of us, but that forgiveness just isn’t there. But your baptism into Christ Jesus is there. And there, in your baptism, is the power to forgive.

Do you know why? Because your baptism is the daily assurance that God forgives you. And our forgiving others flows out of His forgiving us.

Jesus did not teach us to pray, “As we forgive others their sins against us, in this way, Father, forgive us.” Just the opposite. “Forgive us our trespasses, dear Father, so that, as You forgive me, I will forgive others their trespasses against me.”

God doesn’t forgive you because you forgive others. He forgives you out of His merciful heart for Jesus’ sake. And because He forgives you, you will forgive others. The one who refuses to forgive does not believe that he is forgiven. If he did, he would readily forgive others.

There is no bad news for the Christian. There is only good news. Because the Christian believes the good news that he is forgiven by God. And believing, he forgives others who sin against him.

This good news is for you to believe. There is no limit to God’s forgiveness. He does, He truly does forgive you. And so, you dear Christian, will also forgive. Amen.