

Sermon Given at the Anglican Parish of Kingscliff and Pottsville, 13 September 2026

Title: The Divine Art of Forgiveness

Text: Matthew 18:21-35

Introduction

There is a famous saying by Alexander Pope: "To err is human, to forgive, divine." It sounds beautiful, doesn't it? But it also sounds incredibly difficult. Because if forgiveness is "divine," that means it doesn't come naturally to us. It is not our default setting. For God, forgiveness is sheer delight (Luke 15), but for us, a burdensome experience.

We all know the sting of betrayal. We all know the heavy weight of a grudge and hurtful actions. But in Matthew chapter 18, Jesus addresses this very weight. Peter comes to Him and asks, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Peter thought he was being generous. But Jesus turns the math upside down. "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

The Two Graves

There is a profound truth in an old African proverb: "When we don't forgive, we dig two graves: one for ourselves and one for the person we refuse to forgive."

We often think holding a grudge is a way of punishing the other person. But in reality, it is a poison we drink ourselves, hoping the other person will die. When we refuse to forgive, we are bound to the past. We are trapped in a prison of our own bitterness. The person who hurt us may have moved on, but we are still stuck in the moment of our pain.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

To illustrate this, Jesus tells a story about a servant who owed his master a massive debt—millions of dollars in today's terms. The master, representing God, shows justice through mercy. He forgives the debt entirely. He releases the servant.

But then, that same servant walks out and finds a fellow servant who owes him a few dollars. He grabs him by the throat and demands payment. He refuses to forgive.

This passage is challenging because it shows us that there are two attitudes in life. The attitude of the Master, who shows us that true justice is found in forgiveness and mercy. And the attitude of the servant, who stops at justice and refuses to forgive. Jesus is clear: if we refuse to forgive, we are not acting like the Master. And at the end of the parable, the Master hands the unforgiving servant over to be tortured and imprisoned, and Jesus says that our Heavenly Father won't look kindly on us when we refuse to forgive. This is very challenging indeed.

A Supernatural Act

This passage is hard because it asks us to do something that is not human. Forgiveness doesn't come naturally to us. It is a supernatural and divine act.

But I want to clarify what forgiveness is and isn't. Forgiveness does not mean remaining in a situation where someone continues to hurt or abuse you. Forgiveness is not being a doormat. It means to remove yourself from the situation and the cycle of hurt. Then, you set them and yourself free.

As Rumi said, when we forgive, we set two hearts free: the heart of the one who hurt us, and our own heart.

Remembering Our Debt to God

This passage also asks us to remember that we are indebted to God. We are the servant who owed the millions to the master. We too seek forgiveness from the Lord for our many sins, and He has forgiven us so much—more than we could ever repay.

It asks us to remember the words of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." These are dangerous words to pray if we are holding a grudge.

It asks us to remember also the words of Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*:

*"The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:..."*

So, mercy is something we give and receive. We pray for mercy, and the same prayer ought to teach us to show mercy.

Conclusion

The Lord asks us to forgive. Not because the offense didn't matter, but because our freedom matters more than the offense. In addition, forgiveness is not a feeling, but an act of the will. Think of one person who has hurt you today, and make a decision to forgive them, and ask Jesus today to forgive them through you. We cannot, but Jesus can.

Dear friends, as we come to the table of the Lord, let us lay down the stones we are holding. Let us stop digging graves. Let us choose the divine path—the path of mercy and forgiveness. Because we have been forgiven much, let us go and forgive. May God enable us to do this by His Holy Spirit, Amen.

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