

Sermon Pentecost 15A
Matthew 18:21-35
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Grace Lutheran Church
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Sleep, money, and cell phone data. There is one thing that all three of these have in common: we want to get as much as we can. But if we're to be truthful, the observation is usually only made when we don't have as much as we think we need, or when we've run out.

Not having enough sleep, money, or cell phone data have all been heard in the Wegner house, in some form another and I'm confident the complaints have echoed through your home as well. In a Grace Notes article back in Lent of this year, I noted that it seems there is this "gauge" or "tank" that we must fill up to have some sense of security or fulfillment. And when the times come when the gauge is almost empty we find ourselves in either a frantic dash to fill it up. That or we are utterly exhausted wondering where all our energy went.

Getting as much as we can is coded into our minds – that enough of something will make something else better, that doing whatever it takes to get as much as you can is acceptable...regardless of what, or who, is in the way.

And it's not just that one selfish person you might know, or that neighbor who has too many garden gnomes, or whoever those Wall Street Elites might be, or greedy executives who don't care about people. No, this is about all of us: you, me, the person sitting next to you. And no, it may not be money or power or prestige that you or I are trying to get as much of as we can. It may seem like the path we take to get it doesn't put others into harm's way. But all of us are trying to get more of something. All of us are searching for something to fill that perceived gap in our lives.

In Genesis, Joseph's brothers were still worried, even at the end, even after they had reconciled, that Joseph would retaliate for their crimes against him. They lied about their late father's last wishes to appease their own guilt, to temper their past mistakes. To get as much "feel good happy ending" as they could get.

Those in the Roman church were quarreling and fighting over rules about food to eat and which days were sacred. They were vying for correctness and authority, trying to get as much of their opinion heard.

So when Peter comes to Jesus and asks how many times we should forgive those who may sin against us his question comes fully loaded with a backdrop of generations of people trying to get as much as they can. And doing any number of things to get it.

But through the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus reminds Peter, the disciples, and us, that forgiveness has nothing to do with quantity. Jesus shows us that in God's Kingdom

economy forgiveness is not a choice, not a durable good, not a metric on a ledger, not record to be set. It is a limitless, measureless act. That is just plain absurd, isn't it? Because what in the world would limitless forgiveness look like in a modern, educated, transactional, consumerist society?

For Jesus, seventy-seven is no longer an integer on the scale, a number that is higher than Peter's magnanimous suggestion, but a pivot between the economies of the world and the economies of God. As disciples of Christ trying their best to understand and live into this upside-down economy of God we might turn again to Paul's exhortations to the Romans.

he community was arguing over which food laws and sacred days should be observed by the church. But Paul invites them to consider that it is not food or days that make the difference, but *to* and *for* whom the actions and choices are offered.

Even though some among you choose not to eat certain things or even though some among you regard all days as holy eat and regard in honor of the Lord.

Shrug off the economy of winners and losers, Paul might say today, and put on the economy of praise and thanksgiving to the one who binds you together in community. Because we don't live or die for ourselves, we live and die for the Lord. And if we all live and die for the Lord. We are together in the Lord.

A splash of water, one bread broken for many, they are signs of God's new Kingdom economy breaking into the fractured systems of the world around us. The fractured system that tells us we should do everything and anything to get as much as we can because that is what gives you meaning in life. The self-centered economy that can't even fathom the unlimited forgiveness and never-failing mercy that are given as gift to us. Gifts given in every single moment and every single breath by a God who has an excellent track record doing so much with so very little.

The upside-down economy of God – exemplified so beautifully in the words of Mary as she receives the news of life in her womb – is coming, is here, is now.

Famous radio personality Bernard Meltzer hosted an advice call-in show from 1967 to the mid-90s called "What's Your Problem?" After some conversation with a person having trouble forgiving someone, Meltzer was quoted as saying, "When you forgive, you in no way change the past – but you sure do change the future."

Through the cross of Christ, God has changed our future, our very *now*. Forgiveness, grace, love, our lives are sealed by water, bread and wine. God's Kingdom economy is a present reality into which we are called to live and move and have our being.

Limitless forgiveness lives there. Hope lives there. Life abundant and eternal lives there. We live there. And we have a unique role to play.

In a world rife with disunity, criticism, and blame, where getting as much as you can inherently means taking away from others we reflect the love of God in Christ by living, giving, caring, loving, and forgiving an absolutely absurd amount.