

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Genesis 50:15-21). Joseph's brothers, father, and extended family had been living in Egypt now for seventeen years (47:28), but complete reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers had not taken place. The ten brothers had lived in guilt of their evil deeds toward Joseph, but in the assurance that Joseph would not harm them while their father was still alive, causing Jacob more grief. Now that Jacob was dead, they feared that Joseph was "holding a grudge against them" and would finally retaliate in revenge, "reversing to us" the evil.

Epistle (Romans 14:1-12). Luther states: "In chapter 14 [Paul] teaches that consciences weak in faith are to be led gently, spared, so that we do not use our Christian freedom for doing harm, but for the assistance of the weak. For where that is not done, the result is discord and contempt for the gospel; and the gospel is the all-important thing. Thus it is better to yield a little to the weak in faith, until they grow stronger, than to have the teaching of the gospel come to nothing. And this work is a peculiar work of love, for which there is great need even now, when with the eating of meat and other liberties, men are rudely and roughly—and needlessly—shaking weak consciences, before they know the truth.

Gospel (Matthew 18:21-35). Jesus teaches that God has forgiven us far more than we will ever be called on to forgive. Our willingness to forgive a brother or sister is grounded in God's abundant mercy toward us. To forgive is to exercise our childlike faith (v 3). Pray for such simplicity of heart; trust likewise in the simple, enduring love of your gracious heavenly Father, who daily forgives all your debts.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. ¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

50:16 sent a message. They were afraid to approach Joseph. (TLSB)

50:17 Joseph wept. He wept tears of sadness – sadness over the torture his brothers must have been going through, sadness also over the fact that they had not believed him when he assured them of his forgiveness. (PBC)

50:18 threw themselves down. A final fulfillment of Joseph's earlier dreams. (CSB)

50:18 We are your slaves. Their sorrow is so genuine and their repentance so genuine that these brothers come on the heels of their messenger and offer themselves to Joseph as his slaves. (Leupold)

50:19 don't be afraid. Complete forgiveness gets rid of fear.

50:19 Am I in the place of God? Vengeance belongs to God alone (Rm 12:19). As a brother, Joseph is to pardon and forgive. (TLSB)

50:20 God intended it for good.† Their act, out of personal animosity toward a brother, had been used by God to save life—the life of the Israelites, the Egyptians and all the nations that came to Egypt to buy food in the face of a famine that threatened the known world. (CSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 14:1-12

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ² One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

14:1 without passing judgment on disputable matters.† Fellowship among Christians is not to be based on everyone's agreement on disputable questions. (CSB)

14:2 weak eats only vegetables. Paul does not urge a weak and watery toleration of the heretic, the violator of the truth of the Gospel. The strong in faith can eat all things; no line of demarcation between clean and unclean food exists for him. The fact that the meat which he buys in the market has been part of an offering made to a pagan idol does not, for him, erase from it the Creator's mark of ownership; he eats it with a will and thanks the Lord for it. (Franzmann)

14:4 To his own master he stands or falls. The “weak” Christian is not the master of his “strong” brother, nor is the “strong” the master of the “weak.” God is Master, and to him alone all believers are responsible. (CSB)

14:5 one day more sacred than another. The Sabbath, Passover, and other OT festivals had been “holier” days (cf Lv 23). But Christ has freed us from the requirement to observe them. (TLSB)

14:5 fully convinced in his own mind.† The importance of personal conviction and of a correct conscience in disputable matters of conduct runs through this passage (see vv. 14, 16, 22–23). (CSB)

14:7 none of us lives to himself alone. In Christ's Body, we are joined one to another (12:5); we are never alone and ought not live to ourselves. (TLSB)

14:10 God's judgment seat. God will hold accountable those who pass judgment on others where He has not done so. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ ³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

18:21 how many times shall I forgive? Some rabbis taught that a person should be forgiven three times but no more, but we must note that God kept forgiving Israel for hundreds of years. Peter generously proposed that the number be more than doubled – make it seven times, a number that can represent God’s perfection (cf. Gen 2:3; rev 1:20; 5:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:22 seventy-seven times. Jesus meant that forgiveness has no limits. (TLSB)

18:23-35 Jesus also told this parable to make His point that forgiveness has no limits for those who repent. (TLSB)

18:23 kingdom of heaven is like. The kingdom is God’s gracious rule in the lives of his people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:24 ten thousand talents. This was an astronomical amount, estimated at \$10 to 20 Million, depending on the weight and nationality of the coinage, and the effect of inflation. The implication is that our sin puts us so far in debt to God that we ourselves can never repay the amount. His forgiveness is the only way our account can be settled favorably. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:27 took pity. Out of pity, the king forgave the gigantic debt. So our heavenly Father has forgiven the enormous debt of our sin. (TLSB)

18:28 owed 100 denari. This debt is thousands of times less than what the king had forgiven the first servant. (TLSB)

18:32 wicked servant! Not for running up an enormous debt but for refusing to forgive his fellow servant. (TLSB)

18:34 Jailers often tortured inmates. The servant who refused to forgive was doomed. This condemnation represents eternal punishment. (TLSB)