

## Reflection for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

---



Rev. Rob McUtchen  
0423 192 603

### Matthew 18:21-35

Gospel writer Matthew had us thinking about forgiveness in recent weeks. The theme of forgiveness continues with the 70 x 7 teaching, and the parable of the ungrateful, unforgiving servant. It invites us to refocus from the mechanics of who I forgive, how much, and how often, to a question of self-awareness; namely, do I really “get” just how much I am forgiven by God?

The parable concerns the slave of a rich man who had racked up extraordinary debts. Jesus exaggerated – he owed several lifetimes’ wealth to his master. He pleaded time to repay (an impossibility) and instead the master forgave him outright, but is quickly in trouble when he shows no mercy to another who owed him 1/100th of his own debt. He was condemned for not showing mercy as he had received mercy, and that is a moral for which the parable is known.

There is another dimension to this parable; the importance of fully comprehending the reality, the enormity, of forgiveness given. Ask yourself: would any character who owed an impossible debt, was called to account, and then forgiven the whole thing, ever be quite the same again? You would expect a reasonable person to be forever mindful of the fate from which they were saved. And having received mercy, would show mercy to others. Only when a person failed to appreciate what had been given, or was completely lacking in self-awareness, could they act as the slave did.

Penitence and gratitude for forgiveness presume an awareness of wrong doing (sin) and appreciation of that from which they are saved. That is problematic today as so many old measures by which life was lived have faded. A challenge for evangelism in the 21st Century is that many former sins are no longer perceived as sins; the old call to repentance is met by many who ask, repent? about what, repent for what? Persuading the comfortable that pursuit of self-will is less fulfilling than living under God’s will is now a challenge. It takes a lot to help a self-satisfied person journey to awareness that living to God confers a greater freedom and inner peace than self-will. It is harder to inspire a sense of life-changing gratitude which will itself inform gracious, forgiving behaviour.

The parable of the ungrateful servant is a call to mindfulness of the great debt we are forgiven, and encouragement to show that same forgiveness to others – not to feel good, be nice; but because we are forgiven, relieved of the burden of guilt, and promised eternal life. I can remember a priest who when administering the chalice would say ... drink this in remembrance, and be TRULY thankful.

The Lord be with you!

*Robert*