

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Matt 18: 21-35 **“Forgiveness vs. Revenge”** (09/11/2011)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

God’s peace with you!

Let us read together, what belongs to us: The good message for us, about God and Jesus’ teaching of God. Let us read how it got bequeathed to us from our ancestors, written down by Matthew in his gospel, probably sometime after the year 70 After Christ, 40 years after Jesus death. Let us take our pew bibles on page 20 in the New Testament Section and let us read from Matthew’s gospel, chapter 18, the verses 21 to 35.

Forgiveness

21 Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ ²² *Jesus said to him, ‘**Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.***

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

23 ‘For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began

*the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." ²⁹Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! **I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'***

AMEN!

Which part in this text is for you at this point the most important one?
Which sentence, which phrase, which word in this text could be the key for it??? ...

... Thank you!

45 names we read today. 45 people, who lived in our town and were killed 10 years ago in the terror attack against the Twin Towers. Each name a life. Each name an irretrievable [ire-tríe-webel] lost opportunity for relationships, growth, self-finding, love, pain, --- simply life. Simply taken away. What an injustice! NOBODY has the right to take life away; this is God's privilege alone!

We all know where we were 10 years ago, when the planes hit the towers. At 8.46am five hijackers crashed American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower and at 9:03 a.m. another five hijackers crashed United Airlines Flight 175 into the South Tower. 34 minutes later five hijackers flew American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon. A fourth flight, under the control of four hijackers, crashed United Airlines Flight 93 near Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03 a.m. after the passengers fought the hijackers. Around 3,000 people were killed in these terroristic attacks.

There are moments in our lives, which are engraved in our memories. My parents report how the assassination [aessessi-nátion] of John F. Kennedy was similar shocking and unforgettable for them and their generation. Each of us knows exactly where we were 10 years ago, at this sunny Tuesday morning, when the planes crashed.

When the world saw the pictures, the world was united. Countries and people all over the world declared their solidarity – inclusive most Middle Eastern countries; every half-way civilized person stood at this

moment with the victims and at the side of the United States. For a moment in newer world-history all polarizations seemed over. The world was in shock, the world was united and people like Jassir Arafat donated demonstrative blood. Did we use this moment in history wisely?

Leap in time, 6 years later. I start working for First Congregational Church UCC in Chappaqua. One of the first things I learn is, that their beloved pastor at that time had to leave the church after he preached the Sunday after the attacks about forgiveness. I still hear the allegation: How was he able to betray us? How could he do this to us?

Who ever knew somebody who got killed 10 years ago is emotionally involved, has a RIGHT to be emotionally involved, MUST be struck by it. Everything else would be not normal.

We read together from the gospel of Matthew and that Jesus requested to forgive. Not only seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Forgiveness or revenge?!

Is there a way to forgive at all? Can YOU forgive? Was the former minister in Chappaqua right or wrong when he preached about forgiveness 10 years ago? Where the congregants at that time right to protest and to refuse the request of forgiveness? Was he maybe

right, but did he ask maybe too EARLY for forgiveness? Does forgiveness maybe need time? Are there maybe conditions for forgiveness? ... WHAT is right, what is wrong? What would be the right thing to do? Does Jesus ask us for something we cannot fulfill? Or does he ask something, we just don't WANT to fulfill as it seems us just not fair and just?

I confess: These are questions, which I carry personally with me already for decades. I always believed in justice. Justice is so important to me that I picked its Hebrew Word "saedek" for my ministry and that this word is stitched into my ordination stole, which I wear extra again for this special day.

When earlier this year Osama ben Laden got killed, I still lived in DC. It was late in the night when I heard about it in the radio. The news speaker reported that people in front of the White House were dancing and rejoicing. I remember that I was tempted to get on my bike and to join them. I could have been there within 20 min....no problem! But I was already too tired. So I didn't leave my apartment. But there was also something else, which made me staying. But I was not able to couch [kautsch] it in this moment. Over the next days I read in European online magazines and heard direct in telefophone conversations with my friends in Germany, how repulsive this dancing and rejoicing over the dead of a human being appeared to them. I felt ashamed and still feel embarrassed about my feelings of satisfaction. A natural feeling, yes, but Christian? I felt caught – and badly...

The text we read together from the gospel of Matthews is maybe the most beautiful, most provocative, most desperate and most hopeful parable out of Jesus' mouth. Nothing was for Jesus more important than to open Israel's borders to the people OUTSIDE of all borders. Never again a person should be excluded from God in the name of God. No human being would ever have even the breeze of a chance, if God would be as described by specific theologians: as a punishing God!

If God would stick to his own law -the justice as we understand justice- a new flood would be imminent. NO human being would have a chance to escape this eye-for eye justice.

I was Jesus' direct experience with the lost and outcast that human beings cannot repent without God, even they want; to whom would they turn to??? This is the core of the parable of the lost sheep, which Jesus tells in the verses before. Squeezed in between the terms of justice and injustice: Each of us depends on Gods infinite mercy.

This is the reason, why we don't have the right to sentence other human beings to death. You governor of Texas, Rick Perry – in the name of God's mercy: Have mercy with Steven Michael Woods, who is on death row and will be killed next Tuesday if you don't respond God's mercy with human mercy. You are not God, Rick Perry, you have no right, to take life!

To create space for life Jesus wants to break open the whole foundation of dogmatism. This is the provocation of Jesus' manner: That he wants to teach us the waiving of our entitlement. Jesus asks us to replace the uplifted pointed finger through the reached out hand – which carries us over the abyss of our quarrels.

Jesus appeals tirelessly to our compassion. The parable today is the best example. We need to get out of the vicious circle of moral condemnation. A single acting in affect, a single public scandal, a single moral affliction, which was hidden over years successfully, is enough to ruin the social existence of a human being. We here in New York know very well examples even on governor level...

Don't we live all basically from the trust to get accepted unconditionally? ... Sunday for Sunday we pray "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those, who trespass against us". We understand this request very well when we are weak and need forgiveness for ourselves. But can we hear –and speak! this prayer when we feel powerful and invulnerable, God-like?

Justice and mercy seem to be contra-dictory. Revenge seems to be understandable, but is affective. Reflective people would therefore prefer the word justice. Justice asks for fairness. The call for justice is human. But the call for mercy is godly. Whoever shows mercy has crossed the river of pain. Whoever can allow the own heart to give

mercy has freed him- or herself out of a dependency --- a dependency, which keeps us in the loop of hate, violence and pain. Mercy waives justice – not out of moral or religious necessity, but of inner freedom, which comes from God and IS God. Mercy is the peace, God calls us to achieve and to bring to the whole world – to make the world whole and safe.

It doesn't help to set the pain of one side up against another, According to Brown University 140,000 CIVILIANS –not Taliban or Al-Quaida people-, no CIVILIANS, innocent people like you and me have been killed in Afghanistan and Iraq in the last 10 years since 9/11/2011 – politically justified with 9/11. 3,000 lives needless and meaningless killed here, 140,000 so called “collateral damages” over there. All these lives – taken away from us out of our midst. For what?

Why can't we just live in peace? What did we do that people started to hate us so much? What do we need to do to get to the peace GOD asks for?

In pain we stay together. Jesus died for all – the death as well for us, who are alive. Jesus died for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and atheists. Jesus died for the rich and the poor, for Arabs AND Americans, Europeans AND Africans or Asians. It is the CROSS, in front of which we kneel together. We might not be able to stop violence. But our place is at the base of Jesus' cross. Here we are

together with Florence Nightingale, caring for the wounded and hurt, the living and dead, the mourning friends and families.

09/11 has changed us, has changed the world. But if we would limit our pain to the 3,000 we lost here, we would betray their remembrance – and our faith. If their dead should make ANY sense then we need to keep their remembrance by fighting for a just peace, which includes the WHOLE world. Compassion with each creature is our brand. In the suffering of each creature we see Jesus suffering, God him- and herself suffering. We might have as Christians not a political answer – but we know that violence will always just cause other violence. We call for forgiveness where others call for war. We reach out with our hands where others call for enemies and divides. We might be sometimes very few – but this is what we are called to do. It is Jesus, who invites us in the name of God, who created us and calls us to form a just and peaceful world, spanning ALL continents! May the dead of 9/11 strengthen us in this peaceful fight – then their dead might have been not for nothing.

In Jesus name: Let us work for a better world and unite! We ARE the UNITED Church of CHRIST! Come, and join us in the peace walk!

AMEN!