

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 16th Sunday After Pentecost - September 13, 2026

00:00

Glad you're here. Welcome to worship.

00:03

As we gather today, part of what we can be celebrating is that our Jewish siblings mark the New Year, Rosh Hasana,

00:13

and it is a time of hope. Say that properly.

00:19

Was I close?

00:22

I'll tell you stories later about my Hebrew class.

00:30

and I was not the top of the class.

00:39

And it was a pronunciation issue then too.

00:43

At any rate, we do, if we may, join in that spirit of hope and promise of a new life that the year brings.

01:01

It will be only a couple of weeks now that we celebrate the anniversary of this 50 years.

01:10

And I was at my -- let's see.

01:19

I thought we had everything fixed.

01:21

It's probably me.

01:22

There we go.

01:22

We'll try this for a while.

01:26

The question came up.

01:28

It's Truth and Reconciliation Sunday that day too.

01:31

Are we wearing orange?

01:34

And I would say if you like, by all means.

01:37

And a suggestion that came to us that I think is rather creative is to say maybe we want

01:44

to wear them also the next week.

01:45

So you can choose if you'd like to wear them on the anniversary day or the day following.

01:52

I've got some orange I'm wearing on the anniversary day.

01:55

I'll tell you, I'm excited to wear it.

01:59

But I'm going to leave that just there.

02:07

[Music]

02:26

the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 18th chapter.

02:35

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me,

02:42

how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

02:48

And Jesus said to him, "Oh, not seven times, but I tell you 77 times."

02:56

For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts

03:03

with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him.

03:13

And as he could not pay, the Lord ordered him to be sold together with his wife and children,

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all his possessions and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees

03:25

before the king. "Have patience with me, I will pay you everything." And out of pity,

03:33

the Lord of Ed's slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same

03:41

slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves, one who owed him

03:48

100 denarii and seized him by the throat and he said pay what you owe. Then his

03:57

fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him have patience on me I will pay you.

04:04

But he refused and he went and threw him in prison until he would pay the debt.

04:12

When his fellow slaves saw what had happened they were greatly distressed and

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and they went and reported to their Lord all that had taken place. Then as Lord

04:23

summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt

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because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave

04:36

as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his Lord handed him to be tortured until he

04:44

would pay his entire debt. So my Heavenly Father will also do to every one of you

04:51

if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart. The gospel of our

04:57

Lord.

05:01

Won't you be seated.

The Sermon

05:11

grace and peace to you. It was a rather jarring experience this week to read

05:21

a commentator's words that it feels like this parable bullies us into forgiving.

05:33

Those words come from the book Matthew on the Margins. It's a remarkable book

05:38

written by Professor Warren Carter. But he unpacked that a little bit by saying

05:46

that for communities to function at all, for them to avoid exclusion and to build

05:52

reconciliation, forgiveness is vital.

06:02

Still, is it possible?

06:08

I mean, there are the 100 denarii infractions, which is about a year's wages.

06:14

Forgivable, maybe.

06:17

But 10,000 talent infractions, those are about 20 years worth of wages.

06:22

And I'm not sure it's all that possible to forgive or repay.

06:31

I hope you'll forgive this whole preacher for not being able to see where the Kingdom of God is in this story of a very dysfunctional kingdom that seems to be about bill collecting and honor, maintaining and face saving and forgiveness that is only temporary and conditional.

06:56

I don't see it. However, the entire witness of Scripture gives us a much broader picture.

07:10

You might remember a couple last week, actually. The Scripture reading that says that if someone

07:16

refuses reconciliation, let them be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector?

07:26

It's good to remember at this point what got Jesus into the hottest water of all with the

07:31

religious authorities of his day and his critics.

07:35

friendship, Gentiles, and tax collectors.

07:48

Forgiveness is not an easy thing. It is a costly thing. The commentators invite us

07:56

to consider though how costly it is to not forgive. How costly it is to give

08:05

in to vengeance.

08:10

The story I tell is personal. It is one that I tell with my brother's permission

08:20

And it also has something of my part in the events 25 years ago as we celebrated on Friday,

08:29

the anniversary of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers, the World Trade Center.

08:36

My brother worked for United Airlines as an attendant.

08:40

His usual crew was Flight 175, except that day when he got called to Chicago for a stupid

08:48

meeting. Because corporate does what corporate does. He was a passenger on a

08:58

flight and he crossed paths with his usual crew. They teased him about having

09:04

to go to a silly meeting and he teased them about a flight without very many

09:10

passengers and easy work.

09:44

Those events happened on a Tuesday.

09:48

The poor people of Messiah Lutheran Church in Red Lodge, Montana

09:52

got a scorched earth,

09:55

vengeance laden sermon.

10:00

It came from my own billious need

10:03

to vent my spleen and

10:07

to call for justice.

10:12

All the following Tuesday I'm having coffee at the Bull and Bear which is a bar owned by Messiah's former pastor Jim

10:21

who as it turns out had a ministry much richer than he did even when he was in the bullpen.

10:29

The coffee was bitter but the truth was bitter still.

10:38

Jim helped me realize two things. One was that the sermon unnecessarily gouged at wounds that everybody carried and that I was rapidly becoming what I hated.

10:55

I think this is what the parable is about.

11:00

Individual events sometimes, but becoming that very thing that is antithetical to the

11:07

rule and realm of God which is forgiveness and reconciliation.

11:15

now I pray that the folk of Messiah Lutheran Church forgave that sermon and

11:24

maybe that God finds forgiveness for the kind of stuff that I not only carried

11:31

but projected and preached as some sort of gospel.

11:42

When the parables are vexing and many of them are, "I run to the bookshelf and I

11:48

grab work from Father Robert K. Pawn."

11:54

His book, "Parables of Grace," has words that lay nicely alongside the story that

12:00

you just heard. The civil difference, therefore, between heaven and hell is

12:08

that heaven is where forgiveness is received and passed along while in hell

12:16

it is rejected and blocked. In heaven the death of the king, as Bill collector, is

12:22

welcome and becomes the doorway to new life in the resurrection. In hell the old

12:29

life of the bookkeeping world is insisted upon and becomes forever the

12:35

pointless torture it always was. For us personally and for the church at large, I

12:46

think it's helpful to remember more words by Father Capon. He says that

12:52

forgiveness is a gift for the wildly incompetent. It's not a reward for the

13:02

suitably capable.

13:10

Enough scandal for the day, I think.

13:13

And may it be that the God of steadfast love,

13:17

who extravagantly and scandalously loves,

13:22

may that God be one that you experience,

13:29

that you find mercy, and on those days you need it,

13:33

may you be empowered to extend that mercy.

13:41

Amen.