



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 17 September 2023

READINGS

Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

Generosity, forgiveness and love.

What does it mean to be generous? Generosity is a willingness to give, share, or contribute freely without expecting anything in return. It involves acts of kindness and compassion directed towards others. Generosity goes beyond material possessions and can include giving one's time and support.

Being generous is not solely about the quantity or value of what is given but rather about the spirit and intention behind the giving. The genius of generosity is in the way God created it to work. Acts 20:35 sums it up in this simple but powerful phrase, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

God designed generosity to bring joy, fulfilment, and a sense of purpose to both the giver and the recipient. However, to encourage generosity, God made giving more rewarding than receiving because generosity's ultimate goal is to foster a more compassionate and inter-connected community or a family.

The best model of generosity is Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus embodied the essence of generosity during His earthly ministry. His life and teachings provide an extraordinary model of selflessness, compassion, and sacrificial giving. Through His actions and words, Jesus demonstrated the transformative power of true generosity. He exemplified radical generosity by extending forgiveness and grace to those who didn't deserve it, including sinners and even His own executioners (Luke 23:34).

His act of forgiving demonstrated that true generosity goes beyond mere acts of giving and includes a posture of compassion, reconciliation and forgiveness. In the verses just before today's reading in Matthew's gospel we hear Jesus' teaching on reconciliation in the church. It involved acknowledgement of the wrong and the asking and giving of forgiveness. Forgiveness has a high value in the Bible. It is arguable that it is the dominant concern of the whole Bible.

In today's passage from Matthews gospel Peter responded to Jesus' teaching on reconciliation by asking how many times he should forgive his brother. That is a good question. Twice would be pretty good, wouldn't it? But Peter asks seven times! We can understand Peter's need to put a price on generosity – seven times?

But then Jesus says not seven times but seventy-seven times! And no, you are not supposed to keep a tally up to seventy-seven and then refuse to forgive – Jesus means it is unlimited. To drive the point home, Jesus told a story.

There was a king who is owed a debt by a servant, It is a large debt – a very large debt – a huge debt.

Now the consequence for defaulting on debt in those days was to be sold with all your family into slavery.

Or maybe you would be imprisoned until you could pay the debt – which was rather difficult! Maybe friends or family would pay for you. This senior official begs the King for mercy and promises to pay.

The King is extremely generous and forgives the debt. That means he does not hold it against him anymore. He no longer has to repay the money. God, of course, is like the King who shows mercy and forgives the one with debts.

But then the servant goes off and is unforgiving with those who owe him. The unforgiving servant - does not connect at all the forgiveness he has received with the forgiveness he might give. At the end of the parable, he is condemned. Because, when the king heard of this, he put the unforgiving servant in prison and placed the debt back upon his shoulders.

Today is our annual giving pledge Sunday – our stewardship season for 2023. What does this parable of Jesus - have to say to us on this Pledge Sunday. You and I have been recipients of forgiveness and grace in amounts larger than we can begin to count. Each of us has known God's steadfast love, constant favour, and unlimited forgiveness in the face of our on-going betrayal. In the same way this parable asks what our capacity is to forgive, in comparison to the debt we've been forgiven.

IN stewardship, you and I are invited to ponder once again, what is the size of our gratitude in response to the outrageously extravagant, overflowing blessings God has given to us? God has given us life, and then sent His only Son to die for us to free us from our sin "debts" and make eternal life with Him possible for us.

Like the servant in the parable, it is impossible to repay this debt. All we can do is thank God by giving Him our whole selves — our outward actions and our inner selves — and by treating our fellow debtors with the same compassion and forgiveness He has shown to us.

Your invitation to respond to God's work through the spiritual discernment of your commitment pledge, to promise and contribute financially and participate in God's work here at St Michael's and in the larger world is also part of your response. And in total, your work, service, and pledge, and the very way you live your life, the things you do or don't do, is your stewardship.

So friends, let you and I wash our face with the overflowing forgiveness, grace and blessing of the Lord.

And let it transform us – and inspire in us hearts overflowing with mercy, generosity, forgiveness and love.

Amen