

Forgiveness is a Serious Business

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

Jesus was an extraordinary teacher, but most of his teachings weren't "new" or "original." He drew them from the wealth of his Jewish traditions and scripture. We see an example of this today in his teachings about forgiveness after reading from Sirach's instructions on the subject. Sirach wrote about 150-200 years before Jesus' time. On his part, Sirach based some of his teachings on wisdom from even earlier in Jewish history.

The fact that Jesus didn't make up all of his teachings on his own doesn't detract from his brilliance. It simply points to his deep knowledge and respect for his Jewish tradition and his ability to explain its relevance for the people of his day. Now, 2,000 years later, Christians followers owe a debt to our Jewish ancestors for the wisdom they have passed down through Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Gracious God, may you open our hearts to the message your scripture has for us today.

Let us be comforted in ways we need to be comforted, and may we hear your invitation to a new way of living.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

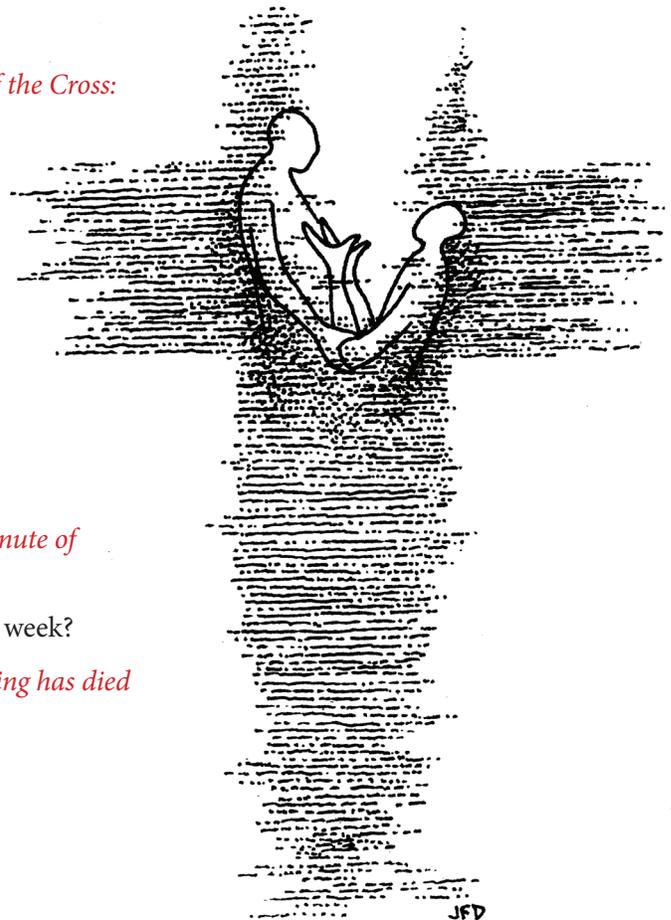
Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

September 13, 2020 • Year A

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

- ▶ Sirach 27:30-28:7 - Call to forgiveness and mercy
- ▶ Romans 14:7-9 - To live and die for Christ
- ▶ Matthew 18:21-35 - The merciless official



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Reflections on the Reading

Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

This is the second week in a row we read some of Jesus' teaching about the importance of forgiveness. Peter's question about how many times we must forgive someone else (seven times?) suggests that in their day people struggled with what some of us still struggle with today—forgiving others only to be repeatedly hurt and disappointed again. We get the sense that Peter may have thought he was generous in offering to forgive someone seven times. Jesus' answer, which can be translated either as "77 times" or "70 times seven times," would have been shocking—as it probably still is to us today. Surely the point isn't the exact number of times we forgive because if we are keeping count, we aren't entirely generous and free with our forgiveness. Jesus' point is not the number of times we forgive, but the "quality" of our forgiveness. If we imagine God keeping track of how many times we are forgiven, it will detract from the mercy. So if we want to be forgiven fully and freely, we are asked to do the same for others.

The parable about the merciless official which follows fleshes out the spirit of forgiveness that God displays and which Jesus asks us to reach for. The closing warning or threat of punishment for those who do not forgive suggests how seriously Jesus wants his listeners to take this issue. We may not like the image of a Father God who will torture those who are not merciful, but it serves to wake us up to the graveness of the issue at hand.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① Are there situations or people whom you find easier to forgive, and whom you forgive repeatedly? Please share.
- ② Are there situations or people whom you find it harder to forgive or forgive repeatedly? What is the difference for you?
- ③ Share about an experience of struggling to forgive someone, perhaps for a very long time, but then finding the freedom to do so. How did it change you?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, thank you for the gift of your living word.

Grant that our reading and study of Scripture lead us to live more faithful lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name,

Amen.