

SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN TIMES

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September 10, 2020

In Matthew, Jesus likes to turn things upside down. When the disciples quarreled over who was the greatest, Jesus says they should all look to the faith of little children. When only 1 sheep is missing, Jesus's shepherd deems it the most important sheep of the entire flock.

Today, Jesus looks at forgiveness. It reminds me of Christmas when I was a little girl. Some things always came in that stocking. An Orange, nuts, and an assortment of those annoying puzzles. The little metal shaped rings I worked so hard to separate; the little wooden box with the nickel (now you see it, now you don't); and the woven tube to stick your fingers in, then pull and twist to remove. Or not, haha. Great torture for the younger sisters, too.

Today we see a parable about a Lord and his servant. This is a parable, not an allegory, so don't look for God, Jesus and the apostles here. The lord found out that the servant owed him ten thousand talents... trust me, more than the servant could ever make in a lifetime. A talent was the largest denomination of money at the time, and 10,000 was the largest number they had a name for.

Point being, the guy owed a gazillion dollars!

How could he escape torture?

How could the lord forgive him?

But he did.



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Now back in the day this servant kind of took his share off the top, so when he was forgiven, he might ought to act like the conduit he is and forgive the next guy down, But no. He grabbed his debtor by the throat and DEMANDED the 100 denari (a bit more than 3 months pay). The debtor said the very same words he used, but he wasn't moved (or reminded).

The crowd runs off to tell the lord, who cannot ignore the offence, punishes the servant. A hard story, a tough ending. This all started because Peter seemed to have had it up to here with one of the brothers or sisters, not an enemy, but an associate, a fellow parishioner, or the office staff. He's been patient. The rabbis of the time felt that 3 forgivenesses for the same offence was enough. So he took it to Jesus. How many times am I supposed to forgive? 7? (More numbers. The number seven is suggestive of wholeness and completeness; Peter did not pull this number out of his hat.) SEVEN TIMES? Jesus asks, laughing, How about seventy times seven times? Peter had the grace not to complain about losing count. If you're still tallying up the count, have you really forgiven?

With so much turmoil on this earth, so much hurt inflicted, we need to meditate on compassion. Vengeance needs to be replaced by restorative justice. We need to stop the anger in our own hearts and stop struggling to forgive. We need to stop counting sins that Jesus already died for. We need to learn the lesson of the childhood toy from the Christmas stocking; we need to let go.