



TOUCH POINT

## Perfect Love Casts Out Fear – Touchpoint for September 13, 2023

### Matthew 18:21-35 (MSG) A Story About Forgiveness

*<sup>21</sup> At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, “Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?”*

*<sup>22</sup> Jesus replied, “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.*

*<sup>23-25</sup> “The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.*

*<sup>26-27</sup> “The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.*

*<sup>28</sup> “The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’*

*<sup>29-31</sup> “The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.*

*<sup>32-35</sup> “The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy.”*

**Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

*“Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?”*

*Jesus replied, “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.*

As I read all the Lectionary passages for today, but particularly the Matthew text, I think of the emphasis on forgiveness. As I read the Parable, the Psalms (Psalm 103, Psalm 114), the writings from Exodus (Exodus 14:19-31, Exodus 15), I see the emphasis on slaves being freed, but I also see in the writings the punishment executed on a whole collection of oppressors. I cannot ignore the contradictions in all of these passages, that is, the desire for revenge and forgiveness at the same time. Perhaps we need to forgive the writers, for they know not what they write.

Where does this desire for harsh punishment being dealt on an oppressor come from? I believe it comes from fear. The inability to forgive comes from fear. There is no love in fear, only punishment. Fear is the hidden obstacle in all of these passages. Fear that is not dealt with produces the desire to love and punish simultaneously – one out of duty, the other out of revenge. Yet these two things cannot go together!

1 John 4:18 reads, “Perfect love casts out all fear.” It says there is no fear in love. So as we read the Scriptures, we see the very human condition presented by the writers: there is both a fear, and an intention to forgive, or at least, an intention to teach forgiveness.

Perfect love casts out all fear. Love and fear cannot coexist.

I had a client once, in recovery, who came to me because she said she had something to speak to the spiritual director about. This was something she'd never spoken of to her therapists during any of her three different treatment stays.

She said she believed her relapses might be because of what she has never told anyone, and it haunts her with guilt. She shared that she had two abortions in her past, and that she believed these acts did not fit with her theology and she should be punished. She said she knew that God forgives her, but she just couldn't forgive herself. This is a condition that most of us have experienced sometime in our lives. After much discernment our conclusions were:

1. She believed she needed freedom from her feelings of guilt and shame;
2. To be punished was the only way to even the scales of justice;
3. If God refused to punish her, she wanted to punish herself with self-hatred and loathing; and finally
4. If God chose not to condemn her, she needed to wield the power of justice in place of God.

To forgive one's self opens us to the possibility of forgiving another. But to forgive another is not to dispense mercy or justice, for only God has that authority. But it is God who is opening us up to grace and mercy, when we are completely unable. We are merely opening *ourselves* up to what God can do when we can't.

Forgiveness is an invitation by God to be free **not** to take on the authority of God. Forgiveness releases the space in our hearts occupied by the desires for justice to be done, the idea that I cannot be free unless justice is done. Forgiveness is letting go of the fear that I'm going to be punished, or that somebody else doesn't get the punishment that I think they deserve. Forgiveness does not condone, acquiesce, reframe or ignore. It is allowing God to be the God of others without us being deputized as God Jr.

**Amen.**

## Opening Songs

### Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)  
Be Still, know that I am God

### Calm Me, Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.  
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

## Bible Passage

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## Touchpoint

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugan)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.  
Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.  
You who know our fears and sadness.  
Grace us with your peace and gladness.  
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*  
In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding  
Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

## The Meal

### Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

## Benediction

### Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.  
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.  
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.  
Deep peace of Christ to you.