



“The Realm of God is Like This” Part 2

The Unmerciful Servant

Wildwood Mennonite Church // June 28, 2020

Worship Leader: Wendy // Music Leader: Audrey // Sermon: David

Welcome to Wildwood...

...or rather, thanks for welcoming us into wherever you are in this at-home worship format.

This is not where we thought we'd be this summer! We are grateful for the familiar patterns and relationships that we have been able to resume, yet we are still grieving the loss of those that have changed and we are still feeling our way through the murkiness of whatever it is that is emerging.

As people of faith, we trust that God is present in all of those spaces: in the familiar, in the grieving, in the unknown. And we are grateful that you have joined us in this place, a reminder that we never walk alone. Welcome.

Welcome to all people from across our city and from other places in Saskatchewan, Canada and the US. Welcome to the Zoom version of Wildwood Mennonite Church. We hope that you will feel the flavour of who we are as God's people as we worship together this morning.

Music For Meditation // [A piano recording from Audrey](#)

Call to Worship

Lord of the morning, I awake to this new day with all its possibilities,
Its uncertainties, its many faces, and its underlying mystery.
May I be able – in your strength – to move through this day
Free of anger
Or bitterness
So that when I meet my neighbour or encounter the stranger,
I may recognize your face.

(taken from An Iona Prayer Book by Peter Millar)

Peace Candle // Sing the Journey #142

Leader: God of all nations, your love is without limit and without end.
Enlarge our vision of your redeeming purpose for all people.
By the example of your Son,
make us ready to serve the needs of the world.

**All: *May neither pride of race nor hardness of heart
make us despise any for whom Christ died
or injure any in who Christ lives;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen***

Offering Prayer

We have been blessed with abundance and our cup overflows. We each have different needs, whether that is physical or emotional or financial or social. Only you God, know of our greatest need and can fill that with your unconditional love. Help us not to squander what we have in front of us and what is within our capability to give. Amen

Song // [Beloved, God's Chosen](#) // Sing the Journey #38

Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Debbie!](#)

Today's story is [The Invisible Boy](#) by Trudy Ludwig and illustrated by Patrice Barton.

Scripture // Matthew 18:21-35 (The Inclusive Bible translation)

Peter came up and asked Jesus, "When a sister or brother wrongs me, how many times must I forgive? Seven times?"

"No," Jesus replied, "not seven times; I tell you seventy times seven. And here's why.


"The kingdom of heaven is like a ruler who decided to settle accounts with the royal officials. When the audit was begun, one was brought in who owed tens of millions of dollars. As the debtor had no way of paying, the ruler ordered this official to be sold, along with family and property, in payment of the debt.

"At this, the official bowed down in homage and said, 'I beg you, your highness, be patient with me and I will pay you back in full!' Moved with pity, the ruler let the official go and wrote off the debt.

"Then that same official went out and met a colleague who owed the official twenty dollars. The official seized and throttled this debtor with the demand, 'Pay back what you owe me!'

"The debtor dropped to the ground and began to plead, 'Just give me time and I will pay you back in full!' But the official would hear none of it, and instead had the colleague put in debtor's prison until the money was paid.





“When the other officials saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and went to the ruler, reporting the entire incident. The ruler sent for the official and said, ‘You worthless wretch! I cancelled your entire debt when you pleaded with me. Should you not have dealt mercifully with your colleague, as I dealt with you?’ Then in anger, the ruler handed the official over to be tortured until the debt had been paid in full.

“My Abba in heaven will treat you exactly the same way unless you truly forgive your sisters and brothers from your hearts.”

Sermon // “The Unmerciful Servant” // David Schwinghamer

(If you’d rather watch than read, [click here for the full video version](#) on youtube)

Today we will be entering into dialogue surrounding the parable of the unmerciful servant. According to Oxford Dictionary, a parable is a “a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.” Often Jesus’s parables are told to represent the realm of God, they address the problem of how we can begin to understand the realm of God, when we struggle to even wrap our minds around our ideas about God. The synoptic gospels alone use a variation of the phrase the kingdom of God eighty-two times, each parable a glimpse into the nature and ethics of God’s realm growing around us.

Thomas Aquinas advocated for a philosophical idea called **Analogical Predication**, which held that none of our words or concepts could really grasp or describe God. **So when we speak about God, we are entirely speaking through analogies.**


Read more on analogical predication: <https://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/cvance/univocal>

Personally I love parables as I see them as an invitation, in pondering parables I find myself free to wonder, free to doubt, and free to discuss with our community. Parables remind me of the Jewish tradition of Midrash which encourages an open space for the discussion and analysis of scripture. Often in church history scripture has been used to end discussions, what if instead we used scripture to begin conversations.

Matthew 18:21-35

Peter came up and asked Jesus, “When a sister or brother wrongs me, how many times must I forgive? Seven times?” “No,” Jesus replied, “not seven times; I tell you seventy times seven. And here’s why.

Pausing for a moment, here Jesus inverts and reverses the ethic laid out by Lamech in Genesis 4:23-24. Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.” Isn’t that like human vengeance, to believe




that the best way to seek justice for myself is to exponentially increase the retaliation beyond even what my ancestors considered. Here the author has framed this kingdom of heaven parable with a teaching from Jesus that replaces magnified vengeance with magnified grace; it's not really about the number and counting off your quota, it's about inverting our earthly tendency to spread harm further. Already this kingdom of heaven is looking very different from the realms of earthly rulers.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a ruler who decided to settle accounts with the royal officials. When the audit was begun, one was brought in who owed tens of millions of dollars. As the debtor had no way of paying, the ruler ordered this official to be sold, along with family and property, in payment of the debt. “At this, the official bowed down in homage and said, ‘I beg you, your highness, be patient with me and I will pay you back in full!’ Moved with pity, the ruler let the official go and wrote off the debt. “Then that same official went out and met a colleague who owed the official twenty dollars. The official seized and throttled this debtor with the demand, ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ “The debtor dropped to the ground and began to plead, ‘Just give me time and I will pay you back in full!’ But the official would hear none of it, and instead had the colleague put in debtor’s prison until the money was paid. “When the other officials saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and went to the ruler, reporting the entire incident. The ruler sent for the official and said, ‘You worthless wretch! I cancelled your entire debt when you pleaded with me. Should you not have dealt mercifully with your colleague, as I dealt with you?’ Then in anger, the ruler handed the official over to be tortured until the debt had been paid in full. “My Abba in heaven will treat you exactly the same way unless you truly forgive your sisters and brothers from your hearts.”

Living in a kingdom of forgiveness does not mean we don't need healthy boundaries and it does not mean we stop seeking justice. We can uphold justice and enforce boundaries while still letting the work of forgiveness put an end to the hurt and offenses we carry. This June is a special season of justice; Black Lives Matter, Pride month, and National Indigenous History month have all converged. There is a lot here that I personally cannot speak too, it's outside of my positionality and I choose to let other voices address those themes. However, I am comfortable in sharing these limited reflections.

- First, I want to thank the people of color in the church who have forgiven my ignorance and extended grace to me, I thank you for the chance to learn, grow, and be better. Living in a society that is built on racism, unconscious biases are picked up everywhere. And it's not an excuse for our actions, but as a group of people seeking to follow Christ in community; we need to be ready to deal with racism when it surfaces, even if it is surfacing unintentionally. This is something for us to figure out together, but I hope that when we cause harm we can be quick to confess to it, repent from it, and I hope that we can forgive the pain we bring to one another. If you're interested in learning more about unconscious racial biases I would highly recommend this video from Robin DiAngelo [Why “I’m not racist” is only half the story | Robin DiAngelo](#)
- All of this considered as a gay christian I know firsthand that sometimes forgiveness and strong boundaries need to go hand in hand. We can let go of hatred in our hearts, and



recognize that toxic people are still toxic and then put boundaries around that relationship. When I came out I received many hateful messages from fellow Christians, and even though I have forgiven them, and even found compassion for them, I have still completely cut them out of my life. Forgiving those hurts does not mean I intend to leave them in my life to text me every week after men's prayer telling me why I'm going to hell. We can forgive, but if the person we are forgiving does not see the harm of their actions and bring change to them, we don't have to keep them around.

Knowing what Christ has done for each of us, this parable offers a caution against becoming entitled and arrogant in our salvation and judging others from this place. Last week Ben had some incredible insights on the parable of the lost sheep, helping us understand the experiences of people who are isolated, lost, and lonely. I grew up in a vein of Christianity that was quick to draw lines between who was lost/found, saved/damned. The parable of the unmerciful servant asks us to set aside our perceived right to judge. God knows and often keeps that information to themselves, God knows peoples hearts and whether they are lost or found asks us to love them.

This parable challenges me, for the times that I have denied others the grace given to me and acted in judgement. And it challenges me for the unforgiveness that I carry in my heart. Outside our living room window is a field of dandelions, and in a way I see my heart like a garden. I can experience the work of Christ and deal with the unforgiveness I carry and pull all the dandelions up from my garden, but in a month the garden of my heart is filled with dandelions again. Unforgiveness is a prolific spreader. And living in semi-isolation during COVID provides plenty of opportunities for it to build up in our closest relationships. Parables like this one are a reminder that I have lavishly been gifted with grace, and that living according to the realm of God asks me to replace my attitude of unforgiveness with one marked by grace. These are just my thoughts, I implore you to ponder this parable and glimpse the realm of God within it. As Rachel Held Evans discovered "Sometimes those gospel stories step on your toes. Sometimes they challenge or annoy. Sometimes they force you to confront your privilege, your pride, or your wild lack of imagination for just how reckless and wild and indiscriminate the Holy Spirit can be." (Inspired, p.155)

Song // [There is a Wideness in God's Mercy](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #145

Farewell for Michaela

Let us remember the presence of our God who is with us and who understands the goodbye we are experiencing....

Leader: God of our life journeys, we celebrate the goodness of Michaela and we ask your blessing on her as she continues on the road of life. We are grateful for her faithful service in our church family and contribution to the ministries of Wildwood Mennonite Church. May the

love we feel as a congregation for Michaela and hers for us, be a bond that continues to unite us, wherever we may be. May the power of your presence, Loving God, bless this moment of leave-taking. Amen.

Two scriptures:

Michaela, remember the words of God to his people:

'I have loved you with an everlasting love.'

(Jeremiah 31.3)

Encouragement for your studies and for your future work:

'I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded, and make the weak strong.'

(Ezekiel 34.16)

Affirmation and prayer of blessing:

Leader: Michaela, as you continue your journey back in Ontario, may you remember that our love and appreciation for you is etched deeply on our hearts.

Congregational Blessing:

As you experience the challenge of change may you also experience the blessing of spiritual growth.

WE KNOW THAT GOD GOES WITH YOU

As you walk through the good times and the hard times, may you never lose sight of the shelter of God's loving arms.

WE KNOW THAT GOD GOES WITH YOU

As you struggle with decisions and wonder about the fruits of your choices, may the peace of God reign in your heart.

WE KNOW THAT GOD GOES WITH YOU

As you begin your studies and move into the area of Social Work, may you see in each person the face of Christ.

WE KNOW THAT GOD GOES WITH YOU

We praise and thank you, God of the journey, for Michaela, our dear friend who is moving on to begin her studies.

We entrust her to your loving care, knowing that you are always the Faithful Traveler and Companion on our way.



Shelter Michaela, and protect her from all harm and useless anxiety.

May this new work and return to her home community be a source of many enriching and transforming moments.

WE KNOW THAT GOD GOES WITH YOU

AMEN

[adapted from Joyce Rupp – [Praying our Goodbyes](#)]

Sharing Time // ["Hey Wildwood..." online sharing](#)

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. It's not the same, but one way to express your grief, anxiety, prayer requests and gratitude is through the "Hey Wildwood" link above. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

Congregational Prayer :

Thank you God for everything under us;
for these chairs on which we sit,
for this church's firm foundation,
for the soil with its burrowing animals and insects,
for the rock down under that, layered by the sea in ancient times,
for the water that flows in subterranean channels far beneath us,
and for the miles upon miles of bedrock,
(unknown and unexplored by all but you),
all the way down to the living heat of our planet,
the molten rock deep in the heart of the earth.

Thank you God for everything above us;
for this solid roof which shelters us,
for the wind swirling and birds soaring skyward,
for the airplanes and clouds high above,
for the upper atmosphere and the stratosphere,
for satellites orbiting, for meteors whizzing,
for the moon and the planets of our solar system,
for asteroids and comets and supernovae and black holes,
for galaxy upon galaxy stretching away into the vastness of space.
The wide span of your work is a mystery we cannot fathom.
You are above us, you are beneath us, God of creation!



Thank you, God, for everything you have given us...

And now we pause in silence as you hear our confessions and concerns:

[silence]

Thank you that even though we are so small in the scheme of things,
you hear our prayers, you answer our prayers.

Bless our church, and help us to be people who point others to you,
help us to be a faithful part of your big picture. Amen.

[i] <https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/2019/08/big-picture-congregational-prayer.html>

Song // [The Peace Of The Earth Be With You](#) // Sing the Journey #77

Benediction

Go in peace, remembering the story that you have been given much. Remember when you meet your family, your friend, your neighbour or the person that has wronged you, God wants you to extend grace. Amen

