

Sermon Series: “Embracing Forgiveness”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—6/10/2007

Title: “He, That’s Not Fair!”

Text: Luke 15: 11-32

Intro.: *Ills: Is enough ever enough?*

Theme: Forgiveness is not about fairness but it is about undeserved grace from God for the sake of Jesus.

Why is forgiveness so unfair?

- Because we get what we don’t deserve (grace) (**Print vss. 11-13**)
 1. Young man demanded and got his father’s livelihood and then blew it with as much senseless, matter-of-fact action
 - a. He did not realize that he had a *need* until he had blown all his grace
 - b. **Print and read Romans 5: 20-21**
 2. But neither did the older brother deserve what was given to him from what was not earned (**Print vss. 28-31**)
 - a. Be careful what you become “enraged over”—it just might be the same thing you are doing or saying
 - b. **Ills.: Deadly Legalism**
 - c. Like pirating music and computer software
 - d. Participating in underground economy by receiving pay without taxation; yet raging against corporate excess and price fixing
 - e. Outraging at homosexual sin while promiscuously tolerating adultery, divorce, and sex before marriage
 - f. *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. James 2:10*
 3. What we need is not fairness but grace
 - a. *If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. Psalm 130:3-4*
 - b. What the Father wanted in his younger son was a thirst for his love, not his stuff
 - c. What the Father wanted in his older son was a need for his mercy, not a self-sufficiency
 - d. What God wants from us is a merciful heart for others born out of our own satisfied need in Jesus
 - e. He wants us to **throw out the “fairness doctrine” and replace it with the “grace doctrine”**
- Because we receive from the Father what we really need (mercy)
 1. Like the younger, we have a re-entry plan which the Father vetoes and replaces with grace (**Read vss. 17-24**)
 - a. He knew his son, well enough, to know that slavery is not what he needed
 - b. **Ills.: Senior survives impossible fall**
 - c. *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” Romans 8:15*
 - d. **Being careful not to settle** for a legalistic religion in stead of grace’s freedom – *It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1*
 2. Like the older son, we don’t get what we want but what we need because the Father loves us that much
 - a. The older son thought that he needed/deserved more, when what he had received had spoiled him
 - b. Not holding another to a standard of penance which we could never achieve ourselves
 - c. When we let go of what we are so afraid of losing, we gain what we could never acquire and are able to give it away without diminishing our supply.

How to practice “unfair” forgiveness

- Be the first to cross the line and forgive
 1. The Father went out first to the prodigal son and also to the sulking older brother (**vs. 20, 28**)
 2. When you are at odds with your spouse, your parent, your sibling, your friend, **MAKE THE FIRST MOVE**
 3. *Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an*

opportunity. Ephes. 4:26-27

- Outdo one another in showing grace
 1. The Father interrupted the son's gratuitous offer with his lavish gifts of acceptance
 2. **Print and read 1 Corinthians 12: 31–13:8a**
- Like the Father, find reason to celebrate rather than denigrate the other
 1. *But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' Vs.32*

Is Enough Ever Enough?

Each week Kevin Tunell is required to mail a dollar to a family he'd rather forget. They sued him for \$1.5 million but settled for \$936, to be paid a dollar at a time. The family expects the payment each Friday so Tunell won't forget what happened on the first Friday of 1982. That's the day their daughter was killed. Tunell was convicted of manslaughter and drunken driving. He was 17. She was 18. Tunell served a court sentence. He also spent seven years campaigning against drunk driving, six years more than his sentence required. But he keeps forgetting to send the dollar. The weekly restitution is to last until the year 2000. Eighteen years. Tunell makes the check out to the victim, mails it to her family, and then the money is deposited in a scholarship fund. The family has taken him to court four times for failure to comply. After the most recent appearance, Tunell spent thirty days in jail. He insists that he's not defying the order but rather is haunted by the girl's death and tormented by the reminders. He offered the family two boxes of checks covering the payments until the year 2001, one year more than required. They refused. It's not money they seek, but penance. Quoting the mother, "We want to receive the check every week on time. He must understand we are going to pursue this until August of the year 2000. We will go back to court every month if we have to." Few would question the anger of the family. Only the naïve would think it fair to leave the guilty unpunished. But I do have one concern. Is 936 payments enough? Not for Tunell to send, mind you, but for the family to demand? When they receive the final payment, will they be at peace? In August 2000, will the family be able to put the matter to rest? Is 18 years' worth of restitution sufficient? Will 196 months' worth of remorse be adequate? How much is enough? Were you in the family and were Tunell your target, how many payments would you require? Better stated, how many payments do you require? No one—I repeat, no one—makes it through life free of injury. Someone somewhere has hurt you. Like the 18-year-old, you've been a victim. She died because someone drank too much. Part of you has died because someone spoke too much, demanded too much, or neglected too much. **Max Lucado, In the Grip of Grace (Word, 1996)**

Deadly Legalism

The pharisaical legalism pictured in the parable of the good Samaritan is alive and well. As a result, a 15-year-old African-American boy in Chicago is not. One warm spring evening in May 1998, Christopher Sercy was playing basketball with a few friends half a block from Ravenswood Hospital. Three teenage Latino gang members looking for a black target approached and shot young Sercy in the abdomen. His frantic friends carried him to within 30 feet of the hospital and ran inside for help. The emergency room personnel refused to go outside to assist the dying boy, citing a policy that only allows them to help those who are inside the hospital. The boys called for nearby police to attend their wounded friend. When the officers arrived on the scene they proceeded to call for an ambulance, but refused to carry the boy inside. While passersby pled with the officers to get the boy into the hospital, he lay in a pool of blood unconscious. When, after several minutes, the ambulance had not yet arrived, the police gave in and carried Sercy into the emergency room. By then, nothing could be done to save his life. As is often true, when we legalistically insist on the letter of the law, the needs of others are overlooked. By holding to standard operating procedures, the "royal law of love" was pinned to the mat. Initially, hospital administration vehemently defended their ER's lack of involvement. Only after a barrage of community outrage did Ravenswood Hospital reverse its policy of treating only those inside its doors. It was Jesus who observed "Woe to you teachers of the law, you hypocrites. You give a tenth ... but you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness." (Matthew 23:23) **Greg Asimakoupoulos. From the files of Leadership.**

Senior survives impossible fall

When does a nine-story fall not kill you? When you make a perfect landing. What should have been a tragedy for Gloria Jummati turned out quite different. While cleaning the balcony of her 9th-floor condominium, the 70-year-old woman toppled over the railing. Gloria had little time to think as she hurtled toward the ground. The 100-foot fall lasted less than three seconds. But Gloria never actually hit the ground. A small, forest-green, door canopy broke her fall. Gloria landed in an ideal spot, right in the middle of the canvas and aluminum pipe construction. A couple of inches in any direction, and the accident could have proven fatal. Instead, "her landing was perfect? The pipes bent and cradled her body, stopping her just feet from the ground." The senior citizen walked away with only a shoulder injury. Not even the canvas canopy was torn. **John Beukema; source: "Woman Survives 9th-floor Fall at Her Fort Lauderdale Condo," South Florida Sun Sentinel (5-12-05)**

*"So God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful kindness became more abundant so just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Rom 5: 20-21***

*But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. . . Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. **1 Cor. 13:4-8a***

Luke 15:11-32

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'

³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " [NASB]