



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### February 26, 2023

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

## The unforgiving servant

Recap of Sermon from 2/26/23 by Robb McCoy

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-35

On this first Sunday of Lent we begin with the knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. On the mountain of Transfiguration, we were told by the voice of God to "listen to him." Over the course of the next six weeks of Lent we will listen to him. We will listen to his stories – parables about the Kingdom of Heaven.

The passage this week is a part of what is known as the "Community Discourse." The fourth of five long sections of teaching. In this discourse, Jesus is focused on what it means to be a community. He may be teaching us about the Kingdom of Heaven, but before there can be a Kingdom, there must first be a community.

This discourse is an extended answer to a question that was asked at the beginning of chapter 18. The disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" They want to know the hierarchy. They want a top ten list, a clear representation of pecking order. That is not, however, what they get. Instead they get a series of lessons and stories that dismantles all of their preconceived notions of greatness. He is not building his Kingdom on hierarchy. He is not building his community with pecking order. Instead, he is building his Kingdom with forgiveness.

The fundamental building block of the Kingdom of Heaven is forgiveness. It is not the typical weapon of kingdom-building. In fact, forgiveness disrupts hierarchy. It disrupts pecking order. It upsets quid pro quo systems. Forgiveness is not a just a sentiment between two people, it is a communal action. It is an action with practical implications of how to relate to one another. Forgiveness is also work. It is not something that comes quickly, easily, or cheaply.

Jesus describes how a healthy community operates. It is with communication, direct conversation, and accountability. Jesus knows that where two or three are gathered, there will surely be disputes, but he assures them that there will also be the presence of the holy. Christian community requires forgiveness and letting go of perceived slights, grudges, and superiority complexes.

Kingdom forgiveness has an economic impact as well. In the parable of the unforgiving servant, the one who is forgiven of a great debt then has no mercy for one who owes him a small amount. This is not the first time that Jesus teaches about forgiveness in economic terms. Most United Methodists pray "forgive us our trespasses," but most Biblical translations keep the Lord's prayer about forgiving "debts" and "debtors."

What does this kind of forgiveness look like in the world? Many who

are quick to claim that the Bible must be followed to the letter in regards to social issues like women preachers and LGBTQ inclusion, suddenly get creative about their interpretations when it comes to camels and needles. What if Jesus, when he told a story about forgiving debts, actually wanted Christian community to start forgiving debt?

In the city of Rock Island there is long waiting list of people wanting to live in affordable housing. I am a commissioner on the Rock Island Housing Authority and Community Home Partners, one of the biggest real estate developers in the city. RIHA and CHP have created wonderful communities that are clean, safe, and well kept. Two Rivers Point, Cascade Gardens, and [Lincoln Residences](#) are just a few of the communities that CHP has created. Rent at these facilities are assessed on a sliding scale and people are able to live in wonderful communities with [other services](#), educational opportunities, and social networking.

One thing that can keep an applicant from being granted affordable housing however, is outstanding bills with utilities companies. So someone applying to live in affordable housing is kept from this community, kept from the ability to catch up economically, and kept from the ability to have a safe, quality home, because they owe money. Someone who is struggling financially is kept out of the system that was created to help people who are struggling financially. Make this make sense. We may not have debtor prisons anymore, but our housing system isn't much different.

So our church has taken up a new project. When applicants to the housing authority are kept from being accepted because they owe a utility bill, our church will step in. We have had a "Good Samaritan Fund" for years. Many churches have something like this. It is a fund to help people in need. For as long as I have been a pastor here, a portion of our Christmas Eve offering has gone to our Good Samaritan Fund. From now on, instead of gift cards, or other band-aid type of charity, we will be directing it to this cause: Forgiving debt so that others may get a place to live.

We have already done it once. We recently paid off someone's outstanding electric bill, which freed them up to be able to finish their application. They can move out of a terrible living space and move into a beautiful community because our church is taking seriously the call to forgive debt.

I am excited to be a part of a church that will participate in the Kingdom of Heaven by forgiving debt and allowing others a brighter hope for the future. If you want to give to this cause, you can click on the button below to go to our online giving page. Make sure you add in the notes "Good Samaritan Fund."