

After spending the day Gardening, Andy and Kate Grosmaire are washing their hands in the kitchen when the doorbell rings.

And immediately they know something's wrong because standing outside is the deputy county sheriff, who tells them the shocking news that their 19-year-old daughter Ann has been shot.

Unable to comprehend what's being said, they ask if Ann's boyfriend Conor is with her.

Conor McBride? The deputy sheriff asks....

Conor's the one who shot her.

Well later that day Ann died from her injuries.

But incredibly Kate and Andy Grosmaire forgave the man who murdered their daughter and visit him every month in prison.

Kate says: In spite of all the pain we've endured because of Conor, I love him and want what's best for him in the future.

Well, that Gospel reading earlier, Jesus tells a parable to illustrate what it means to truly forgive.

So, in verse 21 the Apostle Peter asks him:

“Lord how often will someone sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as 7 times?”

Now at the time a common teaching was that if someone sinned against you 3 times that was it, you weren't required to forgive them beyond that...

In other words, it was 3 strikes and you were out.

And so, by asking the question should I forgive someone *up to 7* times Peter thinks he's being quite generous.

But Jesus says: "Not 7 times Peter; but 70x7."

Now if your any good at maths you'll know that 70x7 is 490.

But of course, Jesus isn't telling Peter to keep count, he says that forgiveness should be without limits.

And to illustrate his point he tells a parable about a King and an unforgiving servant.

Verse 23 says:

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

And so, as this King goes through the books with his accountant, he suddenly notices that one of his servants owes him ten thousand talents.

Now a talent in the first century was the largest unit of currency.

So, into today's money, ten *thousand talents*, would've run into millions of pounds.

As a result, the servant's in a lot of trouble because there's no way he can pay back such an enormous debt.

And so, to recoup his losses the King wants to sell the servant along with his family and all his assets.

Verse 25 says:

And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.

Well in such a terrible predicament verse 26 says: “The servant fell on his knees, imploring the king” “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”

Now of course it’s unlikely that the King or anyone else in the Royal court actually believes the man can ever repay such an enormous debt.

But in desperation the servant’s willing to promise anything to avert the disaster that’s facing him.

And so, in an unbelievable act of kindness the King wipes out the entire debt; sets no conditions, and simply tells the servant that he’s free to go.

Now in response to such an act of kindness and compassion, you’d think servant would show the same kind of generosity to others wouldn’t you.

But as he leaves the palace a free man released from the burden of debt...

Verse 28 says: “When that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying pay what you owe.”

“So, his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him: Have patience with me, and I will pay you. But he refused and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.”

Now to get an idea of the difference between these two debts, the first servant just had 10,000 talents wiped off his account, which is about 60,000,000, denarii.

But this second man only owes his fellow servant 100 denarii, which is pittance in comparison.

And in verse 29 he uses exactly the same words the unforgiving servant used as he begged the King for mercy:

Be patient with me and I will repay you, which is a lot more realistic isn't it.

But instead of showing mercy, the unforgiving servant has the man thrown into prison until he can cough up what he owes.

As a result, verse 31 says that the people witnessing all this are so outraged, they report it to the King, who immediately summons his servant back and say's:

“You wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me, and should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, in the same way that I had mercy on you?”

And it's interesting isn't it, that the king doesn't say: “You should have cancelled the debt”; but “You should've had mercy in the same way I had mercy on you.”

And you know that verse is the key to this whole parable.

You see the King here represents God and illustrates his extravagant grace and mercy towards us.

And in response Jesus says we should be kind, merciful, forgiving, and gracious towards anyone who wounds, or wrongs us, no matter how big the offence.

You see because of sin we're all in debt to God; and like the unforgiving servant it's impossible for us to pay him back.

But because of his grace and kindness, God sets us free by sending Jesus to die and rise again, to pay enormous debt we owe.

That's the good news of the Gospel

And the key to being able to forgive others; is to appreciate how much God has forgiven us. Which the unforgiving servant failed to grasp.

Well you know often when read this parable I tut and shake my head because of this man's attitude, not realising that more often than not I'm just like him

Because of my own failure to see just how much I've offended a Holy God; and what it cost him to cancel my debt by sending Jesus to die and set me free.

And you might be the same

As result we perhaps harbour a grudge towards someone or find it hard to forgive a person who's been cruel, unkind, or thoughtless towards us.

So that instead of forgiving them, we become resentful and want some kind of payback for the wrong they've done to us.

And the bitterness just eats us up.

But you know God reminds us here, that compared to how much we've offended him, the debt someone might owe us is a pittance in comparison.

And Jesus says if I continually forgive you such an enormous debt, then you should forgive others, not 7 times but 70x7.

Well following the death of her daughter Ann, Kate Grosmaire said:

Forgiveness isn't about forgetting. It's not about letting the other person off the hook.

Forgiveness is an emotional release for the forgiver. If we withhold forgiveness, healing can't begin.

Forgiveness isn't an event; it's a lifestyle.

And I have to choose to forgive daily.

And because we forgave Conor for killing Ann, we didn't have to go to prison with him.

Now of course the Bible isn't saying forgiveness is easy or natural.

But it is Christian, and there's no other option but to forgive others when they hurt us.

So, listen to this:

We don't forgive because we have to, but because in love we're compelled to. And only Jesus can enable the kind of forgiving heart this passage calls for. Gratefully, he reminds us of the extravagant compassion he's shown to us, as the least deserving sinners, and by his grace, he enables us to extend that same extravagant compassion to those who we'd label as the least deserving.

And it's this kind of forgiveness that should characterise the church.

Well finally Kate Grosmaire says:

The power of forgiveness is for the person who is forgiving. When you can let go of the debt that's owed to you, there's a freedom and a peace on the other side.

You see it's only when we realise the enormous debt sin has put us in; and what it cost Jesus to free us from it; that we'll be able to truly forgive others.

Verse 32 says:

And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Well I wonder if there's anyone you need to forgive from the heart? Amen