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 Proper 19A: Matthew 18:21-35
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On the face of it, this parable seems straightforward.

A king, a lord forgives a very large debt.

The forgiven person then won't forgive someone who owes **him** money.

Other people tell the king, who gets **really** mad.

The king brings in the first debtor

This king rescinds his forgiveness

And the first debtor is tortured for a long time.

Right? Well, as per usual, there is more here
 than meets the eye so no early BBQ
 for us

I almost cannot articulate how inanely large 10,000 talents is, but I'm going to try.

The first debtor man owes the king 10,000 talents.

1 talent alone is a day laborer wage

for not one, not two, not three,

but 15 years of work.

1 talent is 15 years of labor.

10,000 talents is 150,000 years of labor.

In Jesus' day and age, Syria, Phoenician, Judea, and Samaria could all pay Rome
 their infamously high tax rate, and together

their taxes would not total 10,000 talents.

They know that when the first debtor says to the king,

"Be patient with me, and I will pay back **everything**."

He's lying. He knows it. The king knows it.

No one person could ever repay this much money.

No one person would ever lend this much money to one other person.

No one person, even a king, could ever rationally forgive this enormous debt.

When the first debtor's debt is forgiven, it's a complete shock

A plot twist. What was impossible somehow happens.

This level of extravagant mercy is completely absurd

We don't know how the first debtor feels, but he must have been elated & very relieved.

And as he is in the process of leaving, "as he went out," the text says
the forgiven debtor sees someone who owes him money.

The first debtor grabs the second debtor by his throat
and says, pay me now. Pay me my hundred denarii.

Now like a talent, we don't normally deal with the denarius either.

A denarius is what a day laborer would earn in a day.

100 denarii is what a day laborer makes after working 100 days.

100 denarii is 16 weeks of work, assuming one day off a week.

100 denarii is four months-ish worth of wages.

This second debtor owes $\frac{1}{3}$ of
day laborer's wages for a year.

So this is a lot of money.

Make no mistakes,

If you lent someone this
much money,
you would want it back.

The second debtor says almost the same thing the first debtor to the king:

"Have patience with me, and I will pay you."

Actually, this guy leaves out "everything."

It's an amount one could conceivably pay back.

It's an amount one could conceivably lend.

It's also an amount one **could** conceivably forgive.

150,000 years of wages vs. $\frac{1}{3}$ of a year's wages.

We've moved out of the inconceivable
into the possible.

And yet the first debtor has the second debtor thrown in jail.

Other people see this happen, they go tell the king about it.

It is unclear if they knew that the first debtor had just been forgiven
and the juxtaposition was too painful.

Or if the action is in and of itself overly harsh.
 In any case, the king berates the first debtor,
 and **then** the king takes back his forgiveness,

The first debtor is turned over to be tortured until he could pay his entire debt.
 Now that we have a better sense of just how large 10,000 talents is
 We know that the torture will be lifelong.

Earlier in this very chapter, Matthew 18,

Jesus says,

“⁸ “If your hand or your foot causes you to sin,^[c] cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin,^[d] tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell^[e] of fire.”

Jesus says something incredibly similar earlier in this Gospel, in Matthew 5.

Jesus also gives incredibly similar, almost the exact statements in Mark and Luke.

Jesus loves the hyperbole.

He employs them for the reason hyperboles exist—

hyperbole often to make a point and to evoke emotion.

The 10,000 talents, the hyperbolic amount the king forgives, is absurd
 and thus underlines how irrationally extravagant God’s mercy is.

The 100 denarii amount reveals how stingy humans can be with their mercy.

The hyperbolic lifelong torture underlines how **just how important**
 us mirroring mercy in our own lives actually is.

Apparently, it’s **very** important.

Without all of these components,
 without the king forgiving the incalculably large first debt,
 without the the first man not forgiving the large but repayable second debt
 AND without this king's unhinged, overreaction reaction
 to the first debtor's lack of mercy
 we are meant to understand mercy in a whole new way.
 A way we couldn't if Jesus just said forgive 77 times.

We don't live in a merciful world, so it's no wonder this can be hard to imagine.
 A medical diagnosis can completely bury someone and their family in debt.
 Speaking of absurd, the amount of medical debt in this country is absurd.
 Folks convicted of felonies continue to be punished after released;
 People with felonies can't ever vote again in some states;
 The conviction must be reported on
 nearly all job applications.
 A person with a felony can't even stay
 w/ someone who has Section 8
 housing or that person
 risks losing their housing.

We are all stuck in a difficult, absurd, broken system,
 & it hurts us all, some far more than others.
 And that will not change without major policy shifts
 towards a more equitable system on many fronts.
And we also do not have to only depend on macro changes
 to practice mercy.

The 25th anniversary of 9-11 reminds us of that in many ways.
 Not the big stories we've heard many times.
 I wanna think about the people helping one another down the stairs
 When they could have gone faster by themselves.
 I wanna think about folks sharing water so one another
 could wash out of their eyes.

We don't need a national tragedy to practice mercy.

I know so many people who feel paralyzed and overwhelmed.

And we're not asking to be as crazy merciful as God. That's impossible.

We're asked to be more merciful than we'd often like to be.

And. And yet 150,000 years of wages vs $\frac{1}{3}$ of a year of wages.

We could consider forgiving someone even if their apology kind of stinks.

We could assume the best, give the benefit of the doubt,

In traffic, in lines, and elsewhere.

Some of us need be more merciful towards ourselves,

replacing what our inner critic says with more gentle words.

This all seems small. And y'all it is. It is so painfully small.

And yet small doesn't always been insignificant.

Fish larvae are microscopic, only 2-4 mm, and yet they feed almost **60%**
of the organisms in coral reefs (even more so).

A short, ten minute walk outside can clear your head & boost energy.

So too can little acts of mercy at least begin to mirror

God's mercy more than we might even know.

Practice acts of mercy, no matter the size.