

Mirrors of mercy

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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Summer sermons in our community have been focused on the parables and sayings of Jesus. I've not been present for the whole series, but have enjoyed the challenge of preaching from these bracing, disorienting, reorienting stories over the last few weeks.

This week, my text is Matthew 18:21-35—the famous passage where Jesus instructs Peter on the new math of forgiveness. It's a familiar enough story: a servant is forgiven an outrageous sum of money by his master, and promptly responds by refusing to forgive his fellow man a paltry amount in comparison. The lesson is obvious: we ought to forgive as we have been forgiven. More disturbingly, perhaps, Jesus says that our refusal to forgive will block us from receiving the forgiveness of the Father.

I've been reading Jean Vanier's [Becoming Human](#) this week, and deeply appreciated his closing chapter on forgiveness. He suggests that forgiveness is based on the three-fold conviction that, 1) all of us have value and share a common humanity; 2) each of us can change—human redemption is possible; and 3) unity and peace are at the core of what all of us long for. Without something like these three convictions at work, Vanier suggests, true forgiveness will be impossible for us. And, to return to Jesus' harsh words at the end of Matthew 18, perhaps the absence of these three convictions places us—temporarily, it is to be hoped—outside the forgiving embrace of our Father.

However we come to terms with the harsh words of Jesus that close Matthew 18, we cannot escape the truth that forgiveness matters *deeply* to God. It's also brutally hard, as anyone who has attempted to forgive knows well. At the end of the day, though, I think it is a testament to the dignity of human beings that we can choose to transcend our instinctual needs for revenge, to be proven right, or to mask our own fears, insecurities, and prejudices, by choosing to forgive. We can choose the harder path that leads to life, and in so doing show what we were made for, and by

whom.

To forgive is divine, in a sense, as Vanier suggests near the end of this chapter, borrowing these words from Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz:

In the last resort, humans cannot define what constitutes their humanity. It transcends them. As we work for forgiveness, we are called to reflect that as human beings, each of us is created in the image of God, the most Merciful. This is our calling, our mission: to become mirrors of mercy.

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