Psalm 103:1-13 Of David. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits— who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Sermon: How Can I Help?

This past week I was completely taken by an illustration that was in the New York Times - it was a four panel picture of young mountain lions or some wild cat -used above the headline of the article: Learning to Share. You probably can't see these very well, but I enlarged my favorite one, which perfectly expresses not only resistance to sharing but abject disgust with the whole idea. I believe I've seen that look before - even among family members.

I would not want to try and generalize about the human temperament - I'm sure that there are some people who by an innate grace naturally find great pleasure in sharing and did so from an early age. Then there are the rest of us.

Most of us have some things we naturally like to share — our thoughts, our enthusiasms, our excitement. But then there are other things we might want to keep to ourselves. Of course, this changes over the years. When I was young and my brother and I engaged in typical sibling rivalry, we used to spar over sharing everything from play space in the bedroom to time controlling the TV to portion size at the dinner table. My father used to joke that he had to count the mushrooms on our steak or else there would be trouble.

Of course, the one thing we wanted to have the bigger share of was chores - not that we had many, but when we did we were absolutely committed to equality - something I observed in my own children as well; they'd say, it's not my turn - last time I set the table; I took out the garbage, or I did the dishes, or I walked the dog. When it came to chores the commitment to sharing and the capacity to document what each had done over the last fiscal quarter was just

incredible. They kept tighter books than Fannie Mae, although apparently that's not saying much. I'm surprised they didn't show up with a power point presentations to advocate that it wasn't their turn to clear the table.

As a parent you know your children have to learn to share and so you engage in careful negotiation: I don't care what your sister did or did not do - you do what I'm telling you to do.

As they get older I found I really tired of having to play judge and jury for their sense of equality in sharing of privileges or responsibilities, and it really came to the point where I said - if it become a chore for me to ask you, then never mind.

Of course, that meant they won. They weren't intimidated by guilt like I'd hoped. But then I learned to ask them for something more: I don't want you to worry about what your sister did or didn't do, I just want you to ask me, "How can I help?"

In other words, I didn't want their help begrudgingly - with an attitude like this cat here with snarled lip - I wanted the help to come from a heart that had appreciation in it; help out of a sense of freedom and willingness. And it has been a great joy as a parent to see this evolve as we leave the teenage years behind. But there was a lot of frustration and some hard words between point A and point B.

I sense some of that frustration in Jesus' exchange with Peter this morning. Context is important here - Jesus has been asked, "Who is the Greatest?" and in response has called a child and told them "unless you change and become like children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus has told them a parable of a shepherd who looses one sheep and leaves ninety nine behind on the mountain to look for the one that has gone astray. And he's been asked how to deal with conflict in the church, where he says speak to the person directly, then involve one or two others, then bring it before the whole church - For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Then Peter comes to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

I hear a tone of annoyance in Jesus answer - Peter, how could you be looking for a number here - it's the spirit of the thing - it's a sense that you have been forgiven and so a free willingness to forgive fills your heart. So Jesus gives an outrageous number and tries, in parable form, to get the point across again.

It's not entirely clear to me the best way to read this parable. I read it rather flat before, but does it make more sense with a tone of impatience, frustration, maybe even a bit of fury:

'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

I don't think Jesus is endorsing slavery, torture, debtors prison on anything like that - he's saying to Peter - grow up, get the point!

What is said about forgiveness can be said about everything we undertake as a church or as individual people of faith — it's best done from a heart with that sense of appreciation that the Psalmist expressed — bless the Lord, O my soul. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits— who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live

This Sunday we celebrate the ministry of our Called to Care ministry. Called to Care consists of teams devoted to several tasks: prayer for the concerns of the church providing meals when there is a need hosting receptions after funerals and memorial services in the church visiting members in their homes and in nursing homes

We've also tried to help provide rides to church events, but that has fallen more on individuals than on a set team.

What's great about our leadership and team members in Called to Care is the spirit that motivates the service - I never have to worry about getting a look like my favorite cat when I call with a request.

People enjoy helping, they enjoy freely sharing their time, their talent, their love and compassion. And they want the church to be the instrument of their service, so the glory is shared with God. Well, if not glory, then the thankfulness of others, a sense of being embraced and cared for by the community of Christ. And then, hopefully, those who served and those who are served will be of one mind and one heart and together they can pray: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

That is the sharing we most earnestly desire. 1