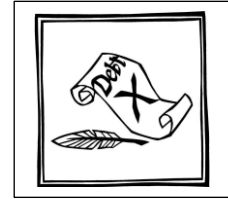


Faith Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sunday, September 13, 2020
15th Sunday after Pentecost



Call to Worship

We gather together today in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

P) Praise the Lord!

C) With all our hearts, we will praise God's holy name!

P) Praise the Lord!

C) Never forget the good things God has done for us.

P) Praise the Lord, all the earth—everyone, everywhere!

C) We too will praise the Lord!

Call to Confession

Joined together as Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us confess our sin in the presence of God and one another.

Prayer of Confession (please join in confessing our sins)

O Lord, we seek Your mercy...yet we ourselves look for payback when we are wronged. We think it “only fair” and “what is right” when we retaliate and use harsh words and withdraw from relationships. The forgiveness You offer on our account is larger than we can comprehend; still, we withhold forgiveness and carry the grudge over petty items. We are eager to do Your judging. And the worst: we conspire our inner thoughts to secure Your forgiveness while avoiding honest repentance.

Forgive us, Lord, for the sins we know in our hearts. Save us, Lord, from the sins we hide.

Declaration of Forgiveness

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger, and has not dealt with us according to our sins. Instead, God has chosen the sacrifice of God's own Son on our account. It is because Jesus Christ pays the last full measure that our sins are forgiven. This gift of forgiveness makes us able, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to choose to forgive, renew, and live again in right relationship with each other and with our God. In the name of Jesus Christ+, your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

O Lord God, merciful judge, You are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore You, that we may delight in doing Your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (1)

Readings and Psalm

- **Genesis 50:15-21** *Joseph reconciles with his brothers*
- **Psalm 103:1-13** *LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy.*
- **Romans 14:1-12** *Accepting diversity in the community of faith*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 18:21-35

When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “Not seven times but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, 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. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But 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.’ ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Would you feel differently if it happened to you? This question pops into my mind when I read our gospel for today from Matthew 18. This gospel is one that often trips me up. By that, I mean it’s one that hits pretty close to home and one that I need to reflect on quite often.

How often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Peter asks Jesus this question, immediately after the gospel we shared from last Sunday where Jesus tells us that if someone in the church sins against you, you should go and talk with that person. And if *that* doesn’t work, then take one or two others with you. And if *that* doesn’t work, then tell the church.

“Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, *how often* should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Peter asks. Jesus answers, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” In other words, infinitely. Indefinitely. Don’t count the number of times. Forgive.

And that's what trips me up. Because I can't help but think there are some things that happen and I wonder, how in the world can we forgive?

September 11th is the 19th anniversary of the horrific terrorist attacks on U.S. soil in which 2,977 people were killed. These were sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, spouses, relatives, coworkers. Men, women and children were senselessly murdered. In these past nineteen years, thousands more became sick or died from health complications related to the 9/11 tragedy. And I've always wondered – how can we forgive those involved for this atrocity?

I did not personally know anyone who was killed that day or who has walked on since then due to health complications resulting from the attack. But for the relatives of those loved ones, how in the world could they ever begin to forgive? And here we are, nineteen years later. Have they been able to forgive?

On October 23, 2014, a friend of mine in Wisconsin was murdered. He had had both of his legs amputated because of health issues and he used a wheelchair to get around. A neighbor's son broke into his apartment one night to steal narcotics. A fight ensued and my friend was smothered by his own pillow. He had family who loved him. Friends who cared for him. And in a moment his life was taken away. And I wondered, how can we forgive this murderer for this senseless death? Yes, justice was served. The murderer is in prison. And six years have passed. Is it time to forgive?

In my mind there are some things that are unforgiveable. Murder. Physical and sexual abuse of children. Violence against women and men. How can forgiveness be justified for the perpetrators?

I gained a new perspective the other day as I was thinking about this. Paul asked if he should forgive someone seven times. Not seven times. Seventy-seven times, Jesus responded. Jesus wasn't trying to be *number-specific* about His answer. I don't think Jesus is telling us that we have to keep forgiving someone until we've reached the seventy-seventh time.

I think Jesus is teaching us that forgiveness is a process that may take a while. A process we must work on every day. Jesus is telling us that He knows we suffer and we struggle and we hurt. And yet, without offering forgiveness, that pain and anger will remain in us and continue to rob us of time. Time spent healing from the pain and moving forward in whatever way we can. Time spent finding some sort of peace. Time that could be spent living our lives.

Forgiving someone doesn't mean letting the offender off the hook. It doesn't mean allowing ourselves to continue to be victimized. It doesn't mean we have to have any sort of relationship with the one who has wronged us. Forgiveness doesn't mean denying reality. And granting forgiveness doesn't mean it has to happen instantaneously. Forgiveness takes time.

I began this sermon with the question, "would you feel differently if it happened to you?"

It did happen. To Jesus. Jesus was crucified on the cross. He was humiliated and tortured. Hung for the world to see. He did this for us. He did this so that we may have forgiveness of sins. He did this for the wrongs that each and every one of us do. Jesus died for us and the sins of the world. God's only Son was sacrificed for us. God knows what we are going through. (3)

While He was still on this earth, Jesus taught His disciples many things, including the Lord's Prayer. Twice in scripture, in Matthew 6 and in Luke 11, we hear this prayer. Jesus taught us not only to ask God for forgiveness but to also help us to forgive others. In fact, we pray for forgiveness *as* we offer forgiveness. "Forgive us our debts, *as* we forgive our debtors." Matthew 6:14-15 continues, "¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

There may be things in your life for which you have found difficulty to grant forgiveness. Perhaps you aren't ready to offer forgiveness. Perhaps you might need just a little more time to deal with your anger and hurt over what has happened to you. Only you can determine when you are ready to grant forgiveness.

Trust God. God knows what you are dealing with and the pain you have endured. Pain that cannot be erased or forgotten. Sit in the quiet peace of God. Let God comfort you and guide your heart in this process. Release control of the pain and anguish. And in Christ's love, you will find peace.

Amen.

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

You welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold Your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through Bible studies and Sunday schools, confirmation classes and youth ministries, especially as we maneuver this through unique and various ways. Nurture new ministries of education and growth.

The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of Your steadfast love. Have compassion on Your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to You to heal, renew, and redeem Your world.

Make Your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom.

Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war.

Give comfort to all who are ill in body, mind, or spirit. We pray special blessings upon those who are dear to us, naming them in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices...(please name your prayer concerns).

Teach us to forgive. Remind us that You do not always accuse us. Still our tongues when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue over opinions. Make this congregation a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors.

Whether we live or whether we die, we are Yours. We thank You for those who have shown us faithfulness, for the knees that taught us how to bow to You and the tongues that taught us to praise You.

All these things and whatever else You see that we need, we entrust to Your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen**

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer *(please join in prayer)*

On my own, what I have to give doesn't amount to much in the light of all You have given to me and in the face of so much need. Put together as a congregation, what we offer You here in love becomes more, not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness. We ask You to bless our gifts and with the addition of Your blessing, just as it was with the loaves and fishes, there is enough for all. Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.

Sources:

www.presbyterianmission.org

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