

*Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost*  
*September 13, 2020*

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

**Prepare for worship:** Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

**Call to Worship:**

*Something Beautiful (UMH 394)*

Something beautiful, something good;  
all my confusion he understood;  
all I had to offer him was brokenness and strife,  
but he made something beautiful of my life.

**Centering Words:**

We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Yet God continues to forgive so we may come into divine glory.

**Affirmation of Faith:** Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Prayer of the Day:**

Forgiving Father, we have sinned and come short of your glory. For the hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class; Father, forgive. For the greed which exploits the labors of men and lays waste to the earth; Father, forgive. For our envy of the welfare and happiness of others; Father, forgive. For our indifference to the plight of the homeless and the refugee; Father, forgive. For the lust which uses for ignoble ends, the bodies of men and women; Father, forgive. For the pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God; Father, forgive. Strengthen us to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgives us. This we pray in the name of Christ who taught us to pray. (From- *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* by Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck)

**The Lord's Prayer:**

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**Prayer of Illumination:**

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading            Exodus 14:19-31

Canticle of Moses and Miriam   Exodus 15:1-11, 20-21

Epistle Reading                    Romans 14:1-12

Special Music

Gospel Reading                    Matthew 18:21-35

**Sermon**                              Forgiveness- Received to Give

**Hymn**

*Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive (UMH 390)*

“Forgive our sins as we forgive,”  
you taught us, Lord, to pray;  
but you alone can grant us grace  
to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless  
the unforgiving heart  
that broods on wrongs and will not let  
old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals  
the truth we dimly knew:  
what trivial debts are owed to us,  
how great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls,  
and bid resentment cease;  
then, bound to all in bonds of love,  
our lives will spread your peace.

**Benediction:**

We have received God’s grace and have been forgiven. Let us go forth to give God’s grace, forgiving, as it has been given to us. Amen

**Response:**

*God Be with You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)*

God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

Matthew 18: 21-35

To forgive is one of the hardest things for humans to do. It is hard to forgive others that have wronged us. It is harder to forgive ourselves for times we have wronged others. We find it hard to forgive.

It is hard to receive forgiveness. We don't deserve forgiveness. We feel that our wrongdoing of the other person or God is too great and should not be forgiven. So, we find it hard to receive forgiveness.

Perhaps our difficulty in being able to receive and give forgiveness is that we have a skewed concept of forgiveness. There are some errors in our conception of forgiveness.

One is that forgiveness is equated with forgetting. We say forgive and forget. If we forgive someone's wrong against us then we forget it. We forget the wrong we have done to someone else. How often our response to forgiveness is "forget it."

The problem is that we often cannot forget it. The wrong done to us or what we have done to someone is etched in our memories. It is part of our experience. We cannot forget the hurt someone has done to us or that we have done to someone, for it is part of who we are. We cannot forget so we cannot forgive.

If forgiveness is forgetting then if we forgive, we lose our sense of justice. We want justice. We want punishment for the person that has wronged us. We deserve to be punished if we have wronged someone. With forgiveness there can be no justice. There are no consequences.

But forgiveness is not forgetting. When we forgive, we do not forget the wrong done to us. When we receive forgiveness, we do not forget the wrong we have done. Nor is forgiveness saying there will be no consequences of our sins.

Then there is divine forgiveness. We tend to want to equate God's forgiveness as a magic eraser. How often do we hear it said that God wipes the slate clean and our sins are forgiven? Divine forgiveness is not God's magic eraser. That is such a cheapening of God's grace.

God sees our mistakes, our sins if you will. God sees that we sinned. God sees our sin and God doesn't forget; they are still there. God should, in our human sense of justice, throw us into the fiery depths of hell for all eternity. God should completely separate from us and sever any relationship with us miserable sinners.

When I worked in Mental Health there was a specific way in which we made corrections if we made an error in the medical record. Of course, we had to write in blue or black ink so mistakes could not be erased. We would draw a single line through the error and initial. Someone reading the record could then see that a mistake was made, what it was and who made it. But the error remained a part of the record.

Even though we may have a list of sins as long as a CVS receipt, or several CVS receipts, God forgives us. Not because God wipes the slate clean and forgets our sin, but because God still wants to be in relationship with us. God looks at this list of sins and does not hold them against us. We may face consequences but God does not hold our sins, even our worst ones, against us. God's love for us is greater than any sin we can commit in thought, word, or deed.

The purpose of forgiveness is not forgetting wrongs. It is not excusing sin. It is not avoiding consequences. The purpose of forgiving is to mend relationships.

Frederick Buechner puts it this way. "...although I make no guarantee that I will be able to forget what you've done and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us. I still want you for my friend." He goes on to say that being forgiven means "you are spared the dull and self-diminishing throb of a guilty conscience" and when you forgive, "you're spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride." "Forgiveness means the freedom to again be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence."<sup>1</sup>

Do you see the power of grace in being reconciled and at peace in the relationship, even as we remember and bear the scars of the wrongs?

This is the power of God's grace, the mending of our broken relationships with God and with each other. Forgiveness is reaching the point where you can be at peace with God because God has forgiven you. Forgiveness is reaching the point

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ACC*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1973) 28-29.

where you can be at peace with the person that wronged you or that you wronged. It is being able to see that person in the grocery store and being at peace with no anger, shame, guilt, resentment or whatever might interfere in the potential of a relationship with them. It does not necessarily mean that you become best buds, but that you may greet each other with peace.

But this doesn't always happen for us humans all at once. When Peter asks Jesus how many times he has to forgive, Jesus replies with a phrase that in Greek can mean either seventy-seven or seven times seventy, 490, times. Jesus' reply does not mean a certain number of times to forgive but to forgive until there is complete forgiveness, so that between the parties there can be peace and reconciliation. It is not about the number of times to forgive but to forgive until you are at peace with God and with the other person.

Jesus continues with the parable of the master who forgives the slave but the slave did not forgive his fellow slave. On the surface, this parable seems to be saying that God does retract grace and our being able to stay in God's good graces is only if we forgive others. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," we pray. Our staying in God's good grace is conditional upon our forgiving others.

But notice that Jesus begins the parable by saying the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king. Jesus is making a comparison between the rule of heaven, God's way of doing things, to the human king. The human king makes forgiveness conditional but the rule of God is different.

Notice verse 35, "if you do not forgive your brother or sister, **from the heart.**" In the ancient world the heart was not just the organ that pumped blood, it was considered the seat of the essence of the person. So what Jesus is saying in this statement and in this parable is not that you forgive others in order to receive God's forgiveness but that you forgive others because you have received God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness has become part of your essence. We remember forgiveness more than we remember sin. We forgive others out of the peace that we have received from the realization that God forgives us and wants to be reconciled to us, no matter how many CVS receipts of sins we may have.

We have received grace and forgiveness from God. We are completely at peace and reconciled to God and therefore, we can give grace and forgiveness to others. We can be at peace and reconciled to others as we are at peace and reconciled to God.