

Worship
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 13, 2020

Introduction

In today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

P. = Pastor

W. = Worship Assistant

A. = All in attendance

Gathering/Announcements

Prelude:

“Prelude in E Minor” [BWV #553]

Johann Sebastian Bach

***Confession and Forgiveness**

P. In the name of the Father, and of the ✙ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

A. Amen.

P. Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P. Faithful God,

A. have mercy on us.

We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways.

We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves.

We place our own needs before those of our neighbors.

We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves.

Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

P. God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own.

Hear the truth that God proclaims:

Your sins are forgiven in the name of ✙ Jesus Christ.

Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world.

A. Amen.

Opening Hymn # 834

“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

St. Denio

A. 1. Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light in accessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious thy great name we praise!

4. Thou reignest in glory; thou dwellest in light; thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render, oh, help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee!

***The Greeting**

- P.** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
A. And also with you.

Kyrie (said)

- W.** In peace, let us pray to the Lord.
A. Lord, have mercy.
W. For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.
A. Lord, have mercy.
W. For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,
and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.
A. Lord, have mercy.
W. For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise,
let us pray to the Lord.
A. Lord, have mercy.
W. Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.
A. Amen, amen.

***Hymn of Praise** (said)

- W.** Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.
A. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

***The Prayer of the Day**

P. Let us pray.

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.

A. Amen.

First Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

After Jacob's death the brothers of Joseph begged for forgiveness for the crime they had done against him. You intended to do me harm, Joseph said, but God used this as an opportunity to do good and save many lives.

- W.** ¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"

¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷‘Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.’ Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.

” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, “We are here as your slaves.” ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.” In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

W. The Word of the Lord.

A. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm: Psalm 103:1-13 (said)

W. ¹Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name.

A. ²**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits—**

W. ³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases;

A. ⁴**who redeems your life from the grave
and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;**

W. ⁵who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like an eagle’s.

A. ⁶**O LORD, you provide vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.**

W. ⁷You made known your ways to Moses and your works to the children of Israel.

A. ⁸**LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;**

W. ⁹you will not always accuse us, nor will you keep your anger forever.

A. ¹⁰**You have not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor repaid us according to our iniquities.**

W. ¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you.

A. ¹²**As far as the east is from the west,
so far have you removed our transgressions from us.**

W. ¹³As a father has compassion for his children,
so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.

Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12

This Christian community has significant struggles with diversity. Here Paul helps us understand that despite different practices in worship and personal piety, we do not judge one another. All Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of us and will judge each of us.

W. ¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord.

Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.

⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.”
¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

W. The Word of the Lord.

A. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation

A. *Alleluia.* **We have an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous;* your sins are forgiven on account of his name. Alleluia.** (*1 John 2:1, 12*)

P. The holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 18th chapter.

A. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Gospel: 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.

P. 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?’ ³

⁴And 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.”

P. The Gospel of our Lord.

A. Praise to you, O Christ.

The Sermon

“Forgiveness”

Just a few years back, a man in Hardeeville, South Carolina went down to the Jasper County Courthouse. There he filed a deed restriction. The restriction barred the sale of any part of his 1,688 acre plantation to anyone north of the Mason-Dixon Line and anyone named Sherman.

It seems that more than a century before, General William T. Sherman’s troops burned every building on this man’s property and Mr. Ingram vowed never to let his plantation fall into Yankee hands again. Now there is a man who knows how to hold a grudge. There is a man not willing to even think of forgiveness.

A number of years ago, the Oscar for Best Picture was given to a Clint Eastwood epic, Unforgiven. The story line follows the hero through his journey to seek revenge on a gang who had perpetuated a horrible crime. As a story about the ravaging effects of revenge, hate, and anger, it is classic.

The main character becomes as violent as those he stalks. That western brand of justice is very much an Old Testament style when you get down to it, isn’t it? An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This was the formulation that was called justice in the Old Testament..

Christ, however, as we see from our gospel lesson for today spoke completely counter to the thinking of the man from South Carolina and the story line of Unforgiven. In one fell swoop, in this parable Christ offered His disciples the law of love and of forgiveness, and made it clear that no one is exempt from exercising such forgiveness.

As we look specifically at this parable in our gospel lesson, we find an unmerciful servant who refused to forgive one who had committed a small crime against him even though the words of His king - “I forgive you and release you from your debt” - still ring in his ears. And therein is the problem.

The unmerciful servant, as we call him, had heard the words with his ears, but they had not struck a responsive chord in his heart.

Probably this man rationalized and felt that what he had done wasn’t really evil. Does that thinking sound familiar? The unfortunate thing was that he got caught! The mercy of the king was completely wasted on him.

There was no response. So many of us are content so often to hear and receive God’s forgiveness as it comes to us in Word and Sacrament and let it go at that. The message rings in our ear and there it stops.

We will be thrashed before we will extend forgiveness to a crabby neighbor, an irritating spouse, or to a child who has been troublesome but who wants to come back home - or even sometimes to the person who sits to the left or right of us in the church pews.

Now admittedly, a willingness to be forgiving can be an enormous demand. We are accustomed to thinking of forgiveness in terms of, “Well, I will forgive you this time, but that’s it.

Once more, and you are out!” That kind of forgiveness is a far cry from what Christ speaks of here in this parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

Here Christ tells us powerfully that once we have received such forgiveness ourselves, we may never arbitrarily withhold it from someone else - lest we lose it and the kingdom of heaven.

Having heard what Christ said, Simon Peter responds: “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”

Peter, like so many of us, has a problem here. It seems as if he has difficulty seeing himself in the role of the sinner who needs forgiveness, for he says, if another sins against me? All too often we see another person as a sinner, but not we ourselves. It is true that others hurt us but we also by our words and actions hurt others.

What we need always to remember is that we are indeed sinners ourselves. We do sin against God and against those around us. We can have a proper understanding of forgiveness, only when we see how it is that we first have been forgiven by God.

In our Old Testament lesson for today, we witness the panic of Joseph’s brothers. Their father, Jacob, has just died and now the brothers are afraid that Joseph is going to take revenge on them for what they did to him many years before.

Remember - Joseph’s brothers sold him as a boy to traveling traders who subsequently took Joseph to Egypt where he became a slave.

The attitude of his brothers is a commentary on how they understood forgiveness. They couldn’t imagine that Joseph would sincerely forgive them. Joseph’s brothers, like so many others, need to listen to Christ to learn about forgiveness.

Christ alone is the key to a genuine understanding of forgiveness. Through Christ, God extends true forgiveness to us. Our heavenly Father is like the king in the parable, He is filled with compassion for the plight of his servants.

He is willing to do what has to be done that we might be forgiven. He has given his only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but be forgiven and have eternal life and salvation.

You see when Christ explains forgiveness to us, He does it in terms of a parable about the kingdom of heaven. Forgiveness is in a sense one of the foundations of the kingdom of heaven, for without forgiveness there would be no kingdom of heaven for you or for me.

It was and always is God’s eternal and complete forgiveness in Christ which brings us into that kingdom. Through faith we have accepted this gift of Christ. We are forgiven. Our sin is taken away. We are members of the kingdom of God.

But the freedom we have received through Christ is not to be squandered or enjoyed selfishly, but it is to be lived out in our forgiving of one another. You see God’s forgiveness to us carries with it a great responsibility. We must take it seriously and respond to it. We dare not take it for granted, or cheapen it.

We need to remember that we are the children of God and members of the body of Christ and God calls upon us to gladly do what he commands: i.e. Forgive, even as I have forgiven you. Can we really do that? Yes we can, through the power of God.

Remember these words of our Lord's Prayer which we pray so often: "Forgive us our trespasses, Lord, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Think on those words. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: # 609

"Chief of Sinners Though I Be"

Gethsemane

1. Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me.
Died that I might live on high, lives that I might never die.
As the branch is to the vine, I am his, and he is mine.

5. O my Savior, help afford by your Spirit and your word!
When my wayward heart would stray, keep me in the narrow way;
Grace in time of need supply while I live and when I die.

***Peace**

P. The peace of Christ be with you always.

A. And also with you.

***Apostles' Creed**

P. Let us confess our faith using the words of the Apostles' Creed.

**A. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living 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.**

***Prayers of Intercession**

W. Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

W. 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. Nurture new ministries of education and growth. Lord, in your mercy,

A. hear our prayer.

- W.** 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. Lord, in your mercy,
- A. hear our prayer.**
- W.** 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. Lord, in your mercy,
- A. hear our prayer.**
- W.** 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. Bring healing to those who are ill or grieving. This day we especially prayer for *Mitch Kasenic; the family and friends of Bill and Barb Henninger, the family and friends of Marlyn Carle, Dave Whitlinger, Pat Brick, Denise and Pat Wylie, Kenneth Shoemaker, and Carol Miller, those suffering from the coronavirus, and those whom we now name in our hearts before You . .* Lord, in your mercy,
- A. hear our prayer.**
- W.** 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. Lord, in your mercy,
- A. hear our prayer.**
- W.** Be with us in these days when gathering together as often as we would like is not possible because of the coronavirus pandemic. When we must be apart for reasons of safety, we trust that you surround us with your sheltering wings. Encourage us in connecting as we are able, reaching out to our neighbors in need and being persistent in prayer. Lord, in your mercy,
- A. hear our prayer.**
- W.** Whether we live or whether we die, we are yours. We thank you for those who have showed us faithfulness, for the knees that taught us how to bow to you and the tongues that taught us to praise you. Lord, in your mercy,
- A. hear our prayer.**
- W.** All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord.
- A. Amen.**

***The Lord's Prayer**

- P.** Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and continue to teach us to pray:
- A. 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 and ever. Amen.**

***Blessing**

P. The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with His favor and ☩ give you peace.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

A. Amen.

***Dismissal**

W. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

A. Thanks be to God.

Postlude: "Fugue in E Minor [BWV #553]

Johann Sebastian Bach

From Sundays and Seasons.com. Copyright 2009 Augsburg Fortress. rights reserved.

Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #23051.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Rev. Kirk W. Bish, Interim Pastor

The Rev. Cyril Hurnyak, Kantor

Alisa Michael, Worship Assistant

Quentin Romero Lauro, Producer/Director/Filmer